





BRIAR AND PALM

A Study of Circumstance and Influence

BY

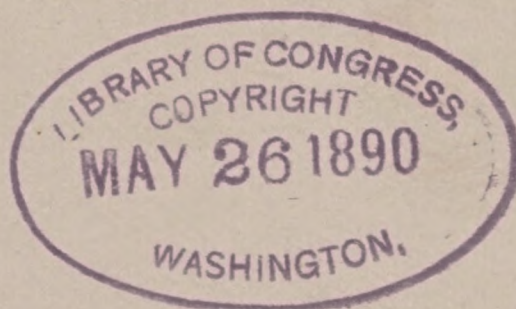
ANNIE S. SWAN, *Smith*

AUTHOR OF 'ALDERSYDE,' 'CARLOWRIE,' 'GATES OF EDEN,' ETC., ETC.

35
'The briar and the palm are the wages of life.'

—TUPPER.

AMERICAN EDITION.



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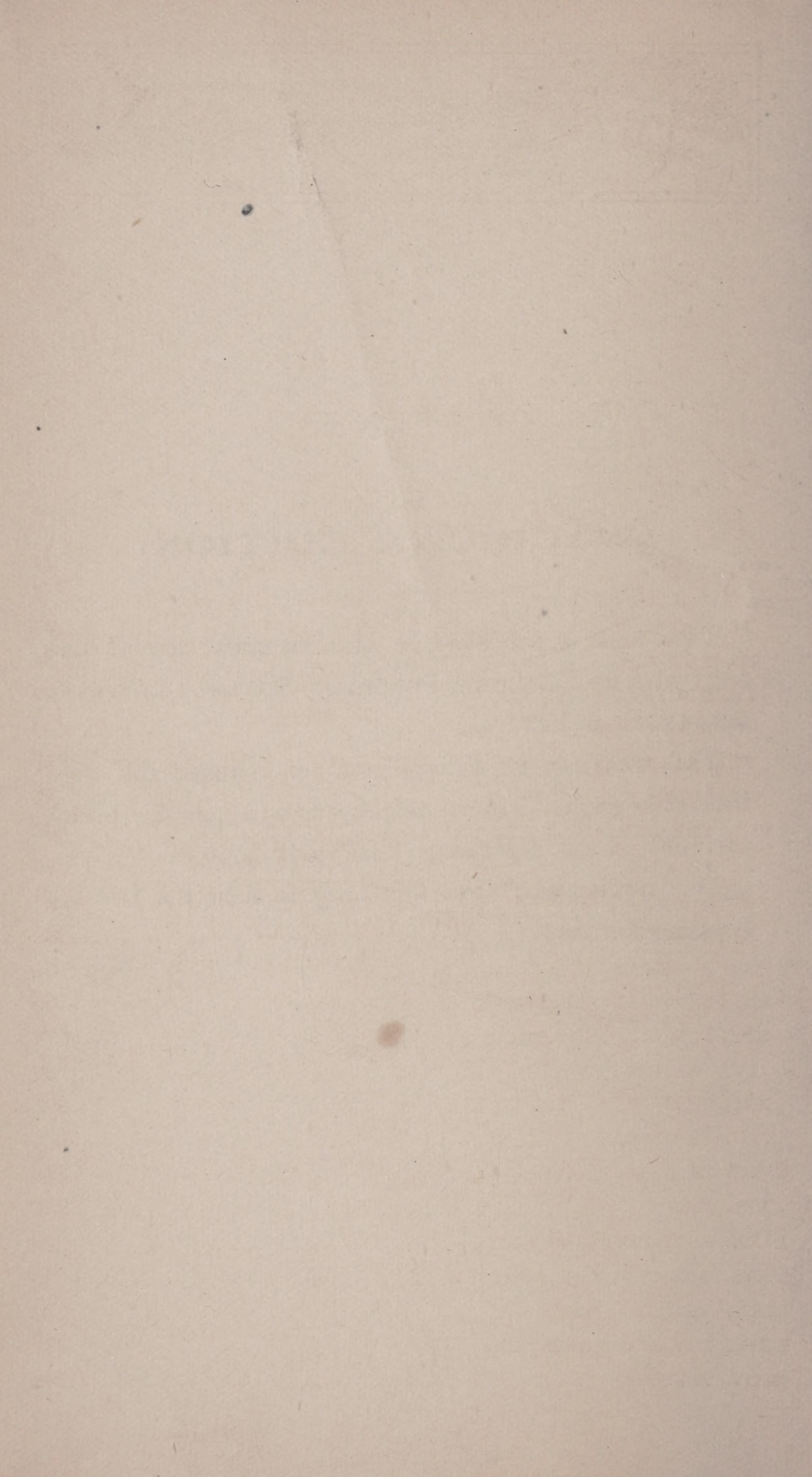
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AMERICAN EDITION.

THIS book is published in America under special contract with its Edinburgh Publishers, MESSRS. OLIPHANT, ANDERSON & FERRIER.

The American Publishers have not changed the original orthography. Our neighbo(u)rs across the ocean are fond of the diphthong “ou,” and have no “z” in their “civilisation;” but this story is none the less interesting for that.





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‘Freeheartedness and graciousness and undisturbed trust, and requited love, and the sight of the peace of others, and the ministry of their pain—these may yet be here your portion, untormenting and divine, serviceable for the life that now is ; nor, it may be, without promise of that which is to come.’—RUSKIN.



CHAPTER I

A STRANGE BEHEST.

‘They say that love, like death,
Levels all ranks, and lays the shepherd’s crook
Beside the sceptre’

BULWER LYTTON.

YOU are about to begin a new life, Denis. After to-morrow you will know nothing of this place. It must be as a dream to you. Only if you should ever be in need you may recall Hanbury Lane, and know there is help for you here at any and all times, so long as I am alive.’

The above strange speech was spoken by a mother to her son, whom she most passionately loved, who was the idol of her heart, the object upon whom every hope was centred, in whom the ambition of a life expected to have fulfilment.

The place in which these words were uttered was a dingy living-room at the back of a small provision shop in Hanbury Lane, a poor, squalid, and even disreputable thoroughfare in the neighbourhood* of London Tower. In that low, dimly-lighted place it would have been difficult to define

*The American Publishers have deemed it best not to change the orthography of the author, which is after the English lexicographers—“ou” for o, and “s” for z, in certain words, etc.

the hour. It had one narrow window looking out into a square stone court, totally hemmed in by the five-storey walls of those tenements which shelter so many hundreds of families in the quarters of the poor. It was one of the early days of June, such a day as becomes a wonder of loveliness and light in country places, but in crowded cities a day of heat and languor and insufferable weariness. The atmosphere of the little room behind the provision shop was close and hot, but not evil-smelling, because there was no unclean thing in the whole domain. The furnishings, if extremely plain and simple, were kept with a scrupulous regard to cleanliness. There was even an air of refinement and taste in the disposal of these poor articles, which indicated that the occupants of that humble home must have at one time known what is commonly called 'better days.'

A tiny bed-closet opened off one side of the room, while at the other a door, the upper panels of glass hung with a neat muslin curtain, opened into the shop. It also was scrupulously clean, and well stocked with articles of that quality and price usually sought by the patrons of such an emporium. The old moth-eaten counter, through much scrubbing, had assumed a yellowish hue, the copper scales and brass weights shone like gold, each article was arranged in its place with tidiness and care. It was a pleasant, wholesome place, an oasis indeed in the desert of Hanbury Lane.

On a low wooden chair behind the counter sat a young girl knitting a sock. She was only seventeen, but looked much older. Her grave face in its repose might have been taken for that of a woman of thirty. The expression was not that of a young girl. It was anxious, brooding, and at times not pleasant, varying of course with the thoughts which chased each other through her brain. Rhoda Holgate was a thinker. She carried it in her deep, flashing eyes; it was written in these lines too early planted on her broad brow. It was not a pretty face, but striking in its way; and her eyes were magnificent, capable of immeasurable liquid depths of tenderness, yet their prevailing expression was one of sullen, half-veiled rebellion. Her dress, a coarse, plain, cheap, black thing, ill-fitting and roughly made, hung about the half-formed figure with a certain rugged grace. Her tawny hair, carelessly dressed, coiled in a loose knot behind, made no unbecoming frame to her face. While the girl's fingers were busy, her head was often turned towards the glass door which gave admittance to the inner room. It was then that her eyes showed active rebellion. She could not distinguish the words being uttered by those within, but it was as if the very sound of their voices irritated her. Sometimes she bit her lips, and once the colour swept, hot, strong, and angry, across her pale grey face. Rhoda Holgate had none of that brilliant colour characteristic of a fair skin and auburn hair. Her complexion was as colourless as her life.

Meantime, however, it is with the pair in the inner room that we have to do.

They were, as we know, mother and son. The mother stood upon the hearth-rug with one hand touching the narrow mantel-shelf, her head turned towards the young man sitting at the table. She had a tall, commanding figure, and a face which, though now haggard and worn, bore traces of a past beauty which must have been of no ordinary type. The mouth was very perfectly formed, but it had acquired in later years, through many hard experiences, a bitter sad curve which marred its beauty. Her eyes were very dark, and still flashed with a fine and brilliant light. Her brow was deeply lined, her abundant hair quite grey. Her hands and feet were well formed, and she wore her poor attire with dignity and grace. Not an ordinary woman, by any means, nor one who had had an ordinary experience. She appeared to be labouring under the excitement of a strong feeling, and her eyes never for a moment quitted the face of her son. He, however, did not seem at all moved. He was a fine-looking, even a noble-looking man, carrying his figure with all the ease and careless grace of young manhood. His resemblance to his mother was strong, but his face lacked the force of character, the strong determination so plainly written on that of the mother. In him the mouth was faulty; it had a mobile and tender curve which, had he been a woman, would have given the chief charm to his face. The mother had been through the furnace; the son, as

yet, had not been harassed by a single care. Time and circumstance lead us in certain paths, and we carry traces of our pilgrimage with us to the grave. Some walk in the sunshine of perpetual joy, others in the gloom of perpetual care. Each has its uses, which we may not know indeed till hereafter. Denis Holgate was surprised at his mother's utterance, chiefly because it was evidently the outcome of a strong emotion. He had not been accustomed to see her moved. Her nature had been, or had appeared to be, very still, undemonstrative, and self-contained. Her very affections she had kept rigidly in curb. Perhaps, however, it was not strange that she should unbend a little to her one son on the eve of his going forth from home to battle for himself upon the field of life.

‘What do you mean, mother?’ he asked, meeting her keen gaze with one of mild astonishment. ‘Is there anything behind what you say? Why should I turn my back on you? Would it not rather be my duty to remember all you have done for me, and try to repay it?’

These words were spoken calmly, and without any trace of loving affection. Yet they were passing sweet to the heart of Anne Holgate. She had toiled and suffered and denied herself for the boy, and he was not ungrateful. That was her reward.

‘You have a kind and a grateful heart, Denis, which pleases me,’ she said soberly. ‘I have made many a sacrifice on your account, to make you what you are, and would again for the same object.’

Tell me, Denis, are you fully equipped for the work you enter upon to-morrow?’

‘So far as graduation honours can equip a man for the serious business of medical work,’ returned the young man. ‘I have experience to gain yet.’

‘Of course, but you have lacked for nothing. You have had every advantage in your studies, have you not?’

‘Yes, every advantage.’

‘Then it is your turn now to do something for me. If you are not as ambitious for yourself as I am for you, I shall be disappointed in you, Denis.’

The young man was silent for a moment.

‘May I ask you something, mother?’ he said at length.

‘What thing?’

‘Why have you made such sacrifices to give me so much? Why has so great a difference been made between Rhoda and me? It has long puzzled me.’

‘You shall know now. I have a story to tell you, Denis. I have given you a gentleman’s education, because you are a gentleman’s son. Are you curious to hear the story I have to tell?’

Denis Holgate did not at once reply. The thought was suddenly forced upon him that there might be a slur upon his birth, of which he had better remain in ignorance. He scarcely remembered his father; he understood that his mother had been early widowed, and he knew she had had a

hard struggle for existence. But he had not dared to ask any questions concerning her past; she had always repelled any desire on his part to learn anything concerning his father, wisely or unwisely he could not tell. The keen eyes of Anne Holgate instantly divined her son's unspoken thought, and a slight smile touched her grave mouth into something of the beauty of long ago. Few smiles had dwelt upon the face of Anne Holgate during the last twenty years. Her sun had set with her husband's death, and even her children, the abiding comfort of many a widowed heart, had been powerless to fill that worshipped place, or to take the edge off that irreparable loss.

'I shall tell you a story, Denis,' she said dreamily, and with a touch of that rare smile still lingering upon her lips,—'a story which will sound like a romance, but which you will know is true.

'Far away from here, in a county near to the sea, there is a fine old property, a family heritage handed down with pride from generation to generation; its name is St. Cyrus—St. Cyrus Abbey. Many years ago, before you were born, there lived there a widowed mother with her three sons. The eldest of the three, heir to the title and the estate, was a hard, selfish, overbearing man, who did not make life pleasant for his younger brothers. There is something grievously wrong, Denis, in the law which gives all to one and nothing to the others, though they are children of the same parent. It made many a bitter quarrel in St. Cyrus. When the three grew to manhood, the youngest brother,

a hot-hearted, high-spirited youth, unable to bear his brother's petty tyranny, left St. Cyrus and went abroad, where he had obtained a good Government appointment. He married there, I believe, but I know nothing more of him. The second son was of delicate constitution, and, as is often the case, carried with it a keen and sensitive nature, peculiarly susceptible to every slight and injury. He was a student, a lover of books and art and music, and, as he spent his time chiefly indoors, he did not come much in contact with his elder brother. He was his mother's favourite, and it was understood that her fortune was to be his. She would, I believe, have laid down her life for him, yet she did not sympathize with his studious tastes, and was impatient even of his delicate health, constantly urging him to join in his brother's sports and become a man like him.

'Manly she called him : the younger son was the true gentleman ; the other, a handsome, cowardly tyrant. There could be no comparison between them. The name of the family was Holgate. The younger son was your father, Denis. I was his mother's maid.'

Denis Holgate sprang to his feet in the intensity of his excited surprise. All trace of calm indifference had fled. He hung in eager expectation, still touched with dread, on his mother's next words.

'His mother's maid !' she repeated, with a slow, proud smile ; 'a creature ineffably beneath consideration, a mere machine, a thing paid to do menial

offices for my lady ; yet who rose high enough to be enshrined in the heart of her best loved son who lived to become his dear and honoured wife.' She drew herself up, a quiet triumph sat upon her sad, proud face.

'I do not know that I can tell you how it came about, Denis,' she continued after a pause.

'Your father, not being strong, was much in the house, and I, Lady Holgate's trusted maid, was much with her, and was sometimes required to do little things for him. He used to talk to me so kindly, Denis, for he had a noble, good heart ; his words used to make mine fill, for I was an orphan, without a living being in the world to care whether I lived or died. It was my lady's charity which took me from the Union at Ainsborough and placed me in St. Cyrus.

'They said I had a beauty beyond my station. Sir Fulke used to tell me so in a way which made my blood boil. But his brother was always kind and respectful as he might have been to any one of his mother's guests. I was grateful for it, and being grateful I became interested in him and everything concerning him. I used to steal down to the library after the household was asleep, and bring up his books to my room, where I pored over them, and tried to understand them and to learn something from them. In that way I picked up a little knowledge, though why I should desire it I did not know. By slow degrees a kind of sympathy and friendship sprang up between us two,—a friendship which could only have one ending for me. I

learned to worship the very ground on which he trod. But I never dreamed that he would lift his thoughts to me in the way of love, but he did; he asked me openly and honourably to be his wife. If I were to attempt to describe Lady Holgate's state of mind when this was made known to her,—for there was no concealment,—I should fail. She was like a mad woman in her fury. She turned me out of the house with what ignominy I do not care to recall. I was willing to go, willing to give him up. I knew it to be true what she said, that I should ruin his life, and I loved him so well, Denis, that I could give him up. But he would not. He made his choice. He took me, Denis, he made me his wife, and gave up the whole world for me.'

She paused here, wholly overcome by the sweet memory of that precious past. Denis Holgate looked on in silence full of wonder. He could scarce believe that this passionate woman, her face glorified with the light of a bygone happiness, could be the mother whom he had never known to lose her self-control. Amazement at the transformation somewhat dimmed his interest at first in the tale she was unfolding to him.

'We were married,' she said after that brief pause, 'and came to London. Needless to say, all communication was at an end at once and for ever between us and St. Cyrus. My husband hoped to be able, with such connections as he had, to earn a living by literary work, as a journalist if possible. But he was not strong, and his style was too

polished and refined, it was above the ordinary level of journalistic work. He did not succeed, and before a year went by I knew that we had made a mistake. Not that we were disappointed in each other,—God knows none could be happier than we,—but the step we had taken with imprudent haste and without any regard for the future. My husband was unfit to fight a hard battle. I did what I could, but we sank step by step, until we were lost in the wilderness of London. In this room, Denis, your father died when you were six years old and your sister an infant in arms. Is that a pleasant thought, Denis, a Holgate of St. Cyrus to die in this hovel, and through me? Yet I loved him ; ay, how well.'

She covered her face with her thin hands, and for a time there was unbroken silence in the room.





CHAPTER II.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

‘Human profit, earthly praise,
Thou didst set before my gaze,
As the beacon stars of life,
As the meed of toil and strife.’

JEWSBURY.

‘**H**E died,’ repeated Anne Holgate, breaking the long silence at length, and once more looking with calm, clear eyes upon the face of her son. ‘And I lived, how or why I do not know. It was a long time before I could rouse myself even to take interest in you and Rhoda. At last I fancied I saw in you a resemblance to your father, and my heart began to cleave to you, as it had cleaved to him. I told myself that you were a Holgate, and that your father would wish you to be reared like a gentleman. You were his only son, his representative, and there was a possibility that one day you might be required to mingle with his people, that the law would demand it. There was even a possibility that St. Cyrus might be yours. I told myself that I must see to it that when that day

came, if it ever did, you might be able to appear before them without shame, and that they would not need to blush for you. To do that has been a fearful struggle for me; I will not hide it from you. There have been times when my heart has failed me; but new courage came, and so I have been able to carry you through. Had it been possible, I should have sent you away from this vile place; I should have cut you off in your childhood from such surroundings as these. But that I could not do without incurring debt, which I would not do, even for you. Tell me once more, Denis, have you lacked anything? Have you not been able to hold up your head among your fellows? Have you not always had money in your pocket to pay your way and more?’

‘I have,’ answered the young man in a low voice; ‘but I did not know at what cost.’

‘I have told you, Denis, in order that you may know what a thing it is for me that you should succeed. Hitherto you have satisfied me completely. Had you been a laggard or an idler in your work, I could not have borne it. I have more to say. I expect more yet. You must let your ambition have no limits. Only when you rise to the height of your profession shall I be satisfied.’

The young man’s eye kindled. His spirit was touched with her enthusiasm.

‘I have something yet to tell you, something which will surprise you yet more,’ she continued. ‘I want to prepare you for every contingency.’

This place to which you are going, Waveney, is only five miles from St. Cyrus Abbey, your father's early home. You may go there, however, and nothing come of it; only you will learn the state of affairs there. I am in absolute ignorance whether Lady Holgate is dead or alive. You must be very wary; you must walk cautiously, and before you reveal yourself to them, if that should seem prudent or desirable, you must come first to me. Promise me that.'

Denis Holgate was bewildered. Events seemed to be crowding thick and fast upon him. He could scarcely comprehend all that was being revealed to him.

'It may be that destiny has led you to Waveney, that the time is at hand for you to take your father's place in the world. You will see; and, above all, you will be very wary. You will reveal yourself to none without first consulting me. I can trust you, Denis?'

The look she cast upon him was half wistful, half commanding. She seemed anxious, as if what she asked was of momentous weight.

'I shall do nothing without first consulting you, mother,' he assured her, when he could collect his thoughts. He began to pace up and down the narrow room restlessly, with an excited look on his face. Perhaps already he felt that it was not the place for him.

'One other thing, and I have done. When you go into the world, you will meet with many fair young girls likely. As yet you have known none.

You are young, and may be susceptible. Never forget who you are ; a Holgate of St. Cyrus. But you must forget this place, as I have said, except when you may be in need of money or advice. There are some things in which I may be able to help you. I am giving you up, Denis, for your father's sake ; but if you marry otherwise than as a Holgate should, I shall never forgive you. You must never commit the terrible mistake your father made.'

Denis Holgate made no reply, but continued his restless walking to and fro. As he passed the glass door, he happened to raise his head, and saw above the muslin screen the head of his sister Rhoda. She was sitting behind the counter, but her work had fallen from her hands, her face was leaning on her hand. It wore a strange expression which struck Denis. A sense of the injustice which had been done to her came suddenly home to him ; and involuntarily found expression in the words, 'Poor Rhoda !' They were spoken to himself, but his mother caught them.

'Why should you pity Rhoda ?' she said sharply. 'She can be nothing to you. I have purposely kept you apart. I did not wish you to become attached to each other, because I knew this must come. You and she will walk different ways, of course, but you need not pity her. She shall be well cared for. She is a clod like me, a daughter of the people. Little will satisfy her. She shall have food and clothing, and will wish no more.'

Anne Holgate spoke with emphasis and passion,

but there was a secret apprehension in her soul. Of late there had been an upheaving of the girl's nature. She had begun to question, even to rebel. It had indeed become almost imperative that Denis should leave home, so that the contrast, daily growing more marked, between the brother and sister might be removed from before the eyes of Rhoda. In childhood she had been made to give way in all things to her brother, and had obeyed through fear of her mother. But with years that fear had diminished, and a rebellious kicking against unjust law had come in its place.

‘You will be careful, in your intercourse with the people you will meet in your new sphere, not to allude to your upbringing,’ resumed Mrs. Holgate, having disposed of Rhoda. ‘Were it to be known where you have been reared, it would be an insuperable barrier in the way of your success. It is a despicable, degrading pride which rules the world, as I have bitterly proved, but it is all-powerful, and must be pandered to. Are you listening to me, Denis?’

‘I am; and I know that you are right,’ he returned somewhat gloomily. He felt depressed by the conversation, which had given to him a morbid view of life. A one-sided view also; his mother spoke from her own harsh experience. The lovely and desirable things of life had not come much in her way; perhaps it was not strange that she should have ceased to believe in their existence.

‘You have proved the truth of my words, then?’ she said inquiringly. ‘I suppose, had you

mentioned where your home was to your fellow-students, they would have been surprised.'

'Some of them would never have spoken to nor recognised me again. They are insufferable cads,' said Denis hotly, smarting still at the memory of certain snubs to which his ignorance of the world's ways had subjected him in his student life.

'Oh, I know them well,' said his mother, with a significant nod. 'Then you understand how it is to be. There are to be no comings and goings between Waveney and Hanbury Lane. Unless you are in need of money or advice, as I said, you must not even write to me. Only once a year I should like to hear how you are succeeding,—once a year as long as I live.'

Denis Holgate stood still in the middle of the room, and looked at his mother. His heart was touched as it had never yet been, his face wore a softened and beautiful expression. The magnitude of his mother's self-sacrifice stirred his innermost being. It showed a strength and even heroism such as he had never come in contact with. But something within him whispered that it was a mistaken heroism, that she was sacrificing herself to a false idea. The best impulses of his heart revolted against the thought of turning his back upon the woman who had made him what he was.

Anne Holgate, while absolutely worshipping this boy, had purposely made herself unlovable to him. She had even repelled the affection which in his earlier years had gone out to her. Why? Because she had the future, this day, perpetually before

her, and wished him to cross the bridge between the old life and the new with the least possible pain to himself. Thus her self-abnegation was very complete, and in its way wholly pathetic and noble. She did not like that look, though it sent a warm thrill to her heart. She thought it showed a wavering, a slight indecision, and her eye grew stern. Before, however, anything further could be said, the glass door was impatiently thrown open, and Rhoda entered. Denis turned and looked at her, conscious of a vast and even a tender pity. He had never been nearer loving his sister than at that moment, though she had often jarred upon his susceptibilities, which education had made finer than hers. They certainly presented a contrast, the gentlemanly young man and the poor, depressed, common-looking girl. But there was that in her face which his lacked, a splendid power. In a few years Rhoda Holgate would be either a noble and good woman, or the reverse. There could be no middle course for her. She was not an ordinary woman. But her brother detected nothing of such promise, though it was beginning dimly to dawn upon the mind of the mother.

He was moved as he looked at her. He was about to go forth into a world full of hope and high possibilities, but Hanbury Lane was the doom of Rhoda. The thought troubled Denis Holgate so much that he felt uncomfortable in her presence. When she entered he took his hat and went through the shop and out into the street.

‘Are you tired staying in the shop, Rhoda?’

her mother asked. 'Surely you have had few customers this afternoon?'

'I have had enough,' Rhoda answered abruptly. 'It is tea-time. Why has Denis gone out?'

'I don't know. He comes and goes as he pleases. We have no right to question him. Get tea, then, and I shall stay in the shop.'

Rhoda sat down on the hearth and fixed her eyes on the fire. Her mother felt irritated, thinking she was sulking. She was seldom just, never indulgent to Rhoda. But she was not conscious of her own harshness.

'Get tea when I tell you, Rhoda, and don't sulk,' she said sharply. 'What moods have taken you of late? You used to be a handy, useful girl to me; what is wrong now?'

Mrs. Holgate was very uneasy concerning Rhoda. She did not like her moods, her restlessness, her occasional bursts of passion. She would have preferred her to continue happy, good-natured, contented as of yore, pleased with a new frock or a day's outing. This change boded ill for the success or peace of the future she had mapped out for Rhoda. Anne Holgate was about to be taught that the power to order the lives of others could not be permitted her. It is a lesson many human beings have to learn; it is good for us to be reminded occasionally of our own impotence.

'Denis is going away to-morrow, mother,' said Rhoda presently, ignoring the questions which had been put to her. 'Where is he going?'

'That need not concern you,' was the cold, curt

answer. 'He is going where neither you nor I can follow him. We can have no part in his life.'

'Why not?'

'Because he is a gentleman. He will be above us. He must move in a different sphere.'

'A gentleman! But he has lived here. He belongs to us. I am his sister, and will always be, however high he may go,' said Rhoda, with a certain slow satisfaction which irritated her mother afresh.

'He will soon forget that, and right and fit that he should. We are not his equals. What do we know in comparison with him?'

'He belongs to us,' repeated Rhoda. 'I shall not forget that I am his sister, nor shall he, though he may try.'

'What do you mean, girl?'

'What I say.' Rhoda lifted her large, calm eyes to her mother's face. 'I want to know now why so much has been given to him and nothing to me. Is it because he is a man and I am a woman? There is a difference between the two in the world, I know, but not so great, I think, as that you have made between him and me. I have looked about everywhere, and I see no brother and sister brought up as we have been. Most share alike. Why did not we?'

Mrs. Holgate turned to the shop door. She would not condescend to any explanations with Rhoda. She was only a girl, to be treated as a child.

Such was the mother's mistaken thought.

'Don't trouble your head with such things,

Rhoda, like a good girl. Get tea now, and if you behave you shall have a new dress next week,' she said, and, entering the shop, closed the glass door.

Rhoda gathered herself up with a slow, bitter smile, and set on the kettle. Her tongue was silenced, but her heart was in active rebellion. Of late questions had arisen in her mind demanding satisfactory answers. Rhoda, too, was awakening. She was beginning to think, to ponder even on the problems of life. She was not made happier thereby. The child was gone, the woman, with a yearning, troubled heart, stood upon a perilous brink. She had need just then of some wise, loving, guiding hand. The voice of experience and of love might have stilled her questionings; without it, and pondering things in her own undisciplined heart, it was inevitable that she should arrive at conclusions which were wholly wrong.

Denis did not come back to tea. Mother and daughter partook of the unsociable meal in silence together, with the shop door ajar, so that no customer or thief could enter unobserved. Mrs. Holgate had suffered severely from the pilfering tendencies which prevailed in Hanbury Lane, and had learned, through hard experience, to keep a strict watch on her goods and chattels.

'I am going out this evening, mother,' Rhoda said, as they rose from the table.

'Where? I do not like you to go prowling about the streets alone. It is not good nor safe for a young girl.'

‘I don’t prowl, I walk,’ Rhoda answered sullenly. ‘Why is it not safe? Nobody ever meddles with me.’

‘Denis does not like it. He prefers that you should stay indoors,’ said Mrs. Holgate.

Rhoda’s blue eyes flashed.

‘I *will* go just because he does not like it!’ she said rebelliously. ‘Why should he meddle with me? Do I trouble him? If I may not question what he does, he has no right with me.’

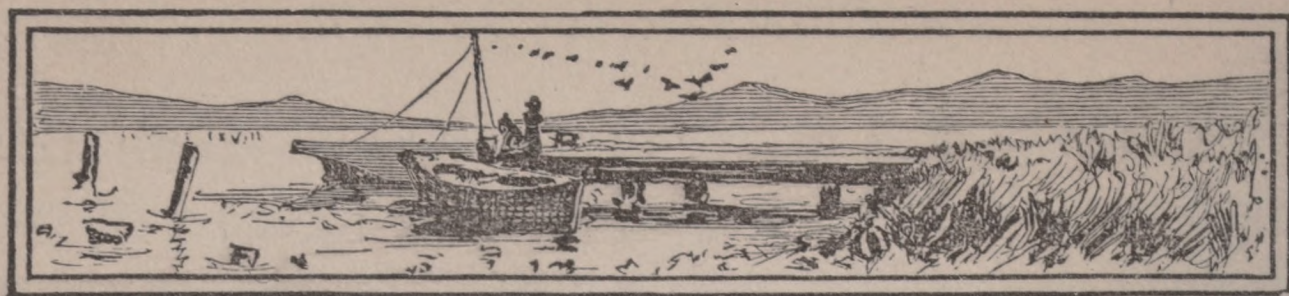
So saying, Rhoda flung a little faded shawl about her shoulders, tied on her hat, and walked out of doors. Her mother followed her to the shop door, and watched her go with a perplexed expression on her face. The girl troubled her; but she allowed her to go without further remonstrance. She was wholly engrossed with Denis to-night, but to-morrow he would be gone, and she would have time to deal with Rhoda.

It was a lovely evening, the close of a choice summer day. But in Hanbury Lane the air was stifling and evil-smelling. A sense of oppression, both physical and mental, stole upon Rhoda Holgate as she threaded her way through the narrow street. She had set out in haste, but soon slackened her pace, and looked about her with her usual compassionate interest. More than once she stopped to speak to some miserable creature, or to pat a ragged urchin on the head as he played among the refuse in the gutter. Rhoda was a favourite with the people in Hanbury Lane, because she did not hold herself aloof from them. She was

always willing to help. Many a tired mother had she relieved by carrying her children off for a long walk. Many an hour had Rhoda paced the streets with a ragged, sickly baby in her arms. Mrs. Holgate knew nothing of these good deeds. She would have forbidden them had she known; but Rhoda kept her own counsel in many things. She had never been encouraged to give her confidence to her mother. All her life she had been cast back upon herself, with no channel for her affections, no outlet for the many longings which possessed her. The girl had an earnest soul, which might have been trained to fine issues. But she had been left to mould it as she liked. Hanbury Lane had long been a problem to Rhoda. She had known its wretchedness all her life, but it was only of late years that she had begun to try to understand it. Why should these things be? was a question Rhoda had been long asking; and, being ignorant, she had blamed the innocent for the wrongs of the poor. The rich, who lived in the great world at the other side of the city, Rhoda hated with a mortal hatred. She regarded them as unscrupulous oppressors, who ground the faces of the poor in order that their own greed and selfishness might be gratified. Rhoda never dreamed that any blame whatsoever could attach to the poor themselves. They were martyrs in her eyes. Her views had been taken largely from books and pamphlets which had a large circulation in Hanbury Lane, and which issued from the socialistic press. These Rhoda devoured, necessarily in secret, and, not being able

to discriminate between truth and falsehood, she accepted all these exaggerated statements as truth. It was pernicious reading for a young, hot-headed, impulsive girl. It excited her, and filled her with burning indignation. All this went on undreamed of by her mother, who had unconsciously added substantial weight to the arguments Rhoda was accustomed to have set before her in her literature. In her own home and family life, Anne Holgate had given a striking example of the distinction between class and class. She had drawn a hard and fast line between her two children; and her conduct had taken a deep hold upon the heart of Rhoda. She brooded over it by day, and dreamed of it by night. She thought of it that June evening as she took her way through the labyrinth which lay between Hanbury Lane and the West End. Rhoda spent many an hour wandering through the streets, and in the summer evenings she often went to the Park, and watched the riders in the Row and the fashionable throng on the promenade with a strange bitterness in her soul, contrasting the purple and fine linen of Belgravia with the rags and tatters of Hanbury Lane. It was about seven o'clock when she crossed the Park and took up a place close to the railing separating the Row from the promenade. She was only one of many, and no one paid any heed to her, nor guessed what was passing in her mind. While she was standing thus, a pair came cantering gaily up the Row, apparently engrossed with each other. They were both young, and the lady so dazzlingly fair that in spite of her-

self Rhoda looked at her in wonder and admiration. She was only a young girl, and her figure was very slender and graceful, being set off by the exquisite fit of her habit. She had a spray of jessamine at her breast, and when her horse shied at the girl close to the railing, the flower fell just at Rhoda's feet. She stooped and picked it up; and the lady reined her horse, and, stooping from her saddle, bade her keep it. The smile with which she spoke was beautiful and gracious, but it stung Rhoda, because it seemed to measure a wide gulf between them. With a frown she crushed the delicate blossom in her hand and threw it into the dust of the Row. She immediately turned away, but not before she had seen the painful flush rise to the lady's face and the tears starting in her eyes. She had not expected that, and somehow the memory of the flush and the sudden tear haunted her unpleasantly all the way home.



CHAPTER III.

NEW FACES.

‘Pride is not a bad thing, when it only urges us to hide our own hurts—not to hurt others.’
GEO. ELIOT.

‘**S**HUT that window, Lyddy; I feel a draught.’ It was a fretful, peevish voice which quite prepared one to see a fretful, peevish face in the speaker.

She was a woman past middle life, a faded, delicate-looking creature, who had been accustomed to make much of herself and her ailments. She was lying on a couch in a pleasant sitting-room, and though the atmosphere, in spite of the open casement, was very close, she had a pile of shawls about her and a white Shetland wrap arranged gracefully about her head. From out that becoming frame there looked a thin, pale face, which still retained a kind of childish prettiness; but it was a weak face, totally devoid of any evidence of strength of character.

‘Nonsense, mamma! it is only a summer wind, and it is as pleasant as possible,’ returned a clear, firm voice, quietly and cheerfully. ‘If I shut this

window we shall be stifled, and you will require a deluge of eau de cologne immediately.'

'I should not have required to ask your father twice to shut a window for me, Lyddy,' said Mrs. Bolsover reproachfully.

'I know that, mamma; I don't suppose you would have asked him even once,' answered Lydia, with a quiet smile. 'I think you forget sometimes that I knew papa as well as you.'

Mrs. Bolsover was silenced. She was no match for her daughter, who had a quiet way of setting her aside which often aggravated Mrs. Bolsover. But she did not complain, for Lydia was a good daughter to her in the main, and was her sole support.

Mrs. Bolsover was a widow, and, though it was well enough known that her wifehood had been a species of bondage, she tried to delude others into the idea that she had been a fondly cherished wife. In her husband's lifetime she had feared him greatly, but now she revered his memory almost slavishly. But Lydia did not and could not forget the petty tyranny her father had exercised over them. She remembered when they dared not go out or come in without his sanction, when every penny spent in household affairs had to be rigorously accounted for, when life had been made a burden by his selfish and domineering ways.

He had been an attorney in the neighbouring market town of Ainsborough, and was supposed to have done Mary Anne Linacre a great honour in making her his wife. Her mother had kept a little

shop in the market square, and Mary Anne had made dresses for her living. So it was accounted a lucky thing for her when George Bolsover fancied her pretty face and married her. But Mary Anne had paid dearly for the honour; she had not lived a happy life. The attorney soon tired of the pretty face, and was not loth to remind her of the obscurity from which he had raised her. He was a shrewd enough business man, but had never been able to make headway in Ainsborough against the Brothers Brereton, an old and honourable firm of solicitors who held the family secrets of many an ancient house in their keeping.

Bolsover had never made more than a bare subsistence, and when he died suddenly, in his fiftieth year, he left his widow and one child penniless. Lydia Bolsover, out of the hard training of her youth, had become a self-reliant, capable woman, and when her father died she found a way for herself without making any fuss. She could accept the inevitable, and though she had pride enough, she could keep it prudently in check. But she never forgot anything, nor forgave an injury or a slight.

A good word spoken by the vicar of Ainsborough had secured for her the situation of school teacher in Waveney, a little village six miles from the town. The salary was not large, but the picturesque cottage in which they lived was free-rented, and Lydia managed to make ends meet. She did not like her work, though she was a capable and successful teacher. It had to be done, therefore

she did it well. She was respected but not beloved in Waveney. There was a kind of armed peace between her and Mrs. Wagram, the wife of the vicar, and Mrs. Dacre, the wife of the doctor. Miss Bolsover resented their interference with the school work, and serenely went upon her own lines, without paying the slightest attention to their suggestions or openly expressed wishes. She was never rude nor uncivil, her manners were those of a lady, but she simply ignored them, though they were patronesses of the school and potentates in Waveney. Miss Bolsover performed her school duties conscientiously and efficiently, but absolutely declined to become factotum to Mrs. Wagram, or to comport herself humbly before her. Something of Miss Bolsover's characteristics could be gathered from her appearance. She was tall and straight, and carried her well-made figure with an easy grace. Her face was clear-cut and healthy-hued, her eyes large and keen, her mouth firm and yet not without a certain sweetness. There was not an undecided feature in her face. Her attire was always faultless, though conspicuously plain and severe in style. Miss Bolsover wore no lace ruffles nor ribbon bows, no ornaments except a plain gold brooch fastening her linen collar. Perhaps she had few womanly weaknesses; certainly she had not vanity or affectation. She was practical, straightforward, honest, and could not tolerate weakness in others. Undoubtedly a clever and capable woman, but scarcely a lovable one. If she had a tender side, it had never yet been exhibited

to a human being. The children under her care rendered her implicit obedience and respect, but they feared her. She had never been known to deal lightly with any offender; the discipline of Waveney school was perfect.

Though it was evening, her school work was not over. She was preparing white-seam for the sewing class, and it was pleasant to watch how deftly and skilfully her white fingers did their work. Everything Lydia Bolsover did was well done, and seemed to cost her no effort.

‘Mrs. Dacre was in school this afternoon, mamma,’ she said presently, without lifting her eyes from her work.

‘Was she? That is nothing new. But I must say I think it queer that she should never have called here. My husband’s profession was as good as Doctor Dacre’s any day; anyway she might have come, seeing I’m such a good customer to her husband. And look how kind and friendly Mrs. Wagram is! Why, she thinks nothing of sitting two whole hours here of an afternoon. There isn’t any pride about her.’

‘Or you don’t see it,’ said Lydia, with a little curl of her straight upper lip. ‘Mrs. Wagram comes here and talks to you as she would talk to Sally Phillips, her cook’s mother. For pride there isn’t much to choose between the two. They make me sick when they come into school; but I’m their match, and they know it. They hate me, but so long as I do my work faithfully they can’t hurt me, so I have the best of it.’

‘Dear me, Lyddy, how you talk! I’m sure you exaggerate; Mrs. Wagram admires you very much.’

‘About as much as I admire her!’ said Lydia, biting her thread through with unnecessary vehemence. ‘I wish you wouldn’t say Lyddy, mother. I can’t bear to hear it.’

‘You’re always finding fault with me, Lydia,’ said Mrs. Bolsover, making a violent effort to jerk out the name correctly. ‘I know I’m a burden on you, but it won’t be for long.’

‘Mrs. Dacre had an errand this afternoon, mamma,’ said Lydia serenely, ignoring her mother’s speech. ‘The doctor’s new assistant has come.’

‘Well, what of that? I hope she didn’t call to say he’d attend me in future, because I won’t have him, Lyddy!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bolsover excitedly. ‘Although I’m reduced, I won’t let myself into the hands of one o’ them raw lads from the hospital. I’ve more respect for my body.’

‘I wish you wouldn’t be so idiotic, mamma,’ said Lydia quickly. ‘You might let me finish what I have to say. She wants to know if we can have him to lodge here.’

‘Lodge here! and have him going out and in at all hours, leaving the front door open in the night-time, and all sorts of poor creatures finding their way in. Not likely. I hope you said no at once.’

‘I didn’t, but I will to-morrow when I see Mrs. Dacre; or I can write a note and send Patty over with it to-night.’

‘Why can’t they have him at the Dovecot, as

they've always had? I never heard of a doctor's assistant living out of the house before.'

'There are too many little babies; the servants are slaved nearly to death already,' said Lydia, curling her lip again. 'I should think the assistants would approve of the new arrangement. I'm told they don't have it all their own way. The vittles is skimp, as Patty would say.'

'Do you say so? and her always hanging in silks and velvets,' said Mrs. Bolsover quite vivaciously. She dearly loved a bit of gossip, and Lydia did not often purvey for her. 'Well, Lyddy, even in my hardest times, when your poor father was struggling up, I never took it out of my inside to put it on my outside; I was above that.'

'We sometimes hadn't much either for inside or outside,' retorted Lydia, who always recalled the stern reality of the past as a foil to her mother's sentimental recollections.

'What would he pay suppose we were to take him in?' asked Mrs. Bolsover.

'I didn't ask. But as I thought you were set upon a lodger, mother, I said to Mrs. Dacre she might tell the assistant to call to-night.'

'Call! Then I must have another cap on. Why, he might come in at any minute, and me such a guy.'

'Don't trouble; very likely he won't look at you except in the light of a landlady who may or may not make capital out of him. Lie down and let us talk of it. Do you suppose Patty is able to undertake any extra work? It must be under-

stood that she and not I would require to clean the lodger's boots and wash his tea-cups.'

'Patty's a big strong girl; there's nothing to hinder her doing for him. And if he'd pay the matter of a sovereign a week, Lyddy, it wouldn't be to be despised.'

'No, we should be the better for it. Doctor Dacre's bills are heavy enough. It takes my salary to make ends meet; there's nothing left over. I have been thinking of late, mamma, that something would need to be done.'

'Then, if he comes, you'll say you'll take him.'

'You will. I am not to be his landlady.'

'But the house is yours, Lyddy.'

'But you are the mistress. You must make arrangements with Doctor Holgate.'

'Holgate! is that his name? I wonder if he's any relation of the Holgates of St. Cyrus; you know the Abbey on this side of Ainsborough. My grandmother was housekeeper there for over forty years.'

'Not likely; and, mamma, don't you, I beseech you, go informing Doctor Holgate of all the relations you had who served in great families. It won't improve my position in Waveney to have it known that your grandmother was a housekeeper at St. Cyrus.'

'Who said I'd say anything to the young man?' said Mrs. Bolsover weakly. 'I must say you catch me up too quick, Lyddy. You are very hard on your poor mother. You're too like your poor

father in that. You'll never get a husband if you snap at young men the way you do at me. They like to be treated civil, as you'll find to your cost when you're a miserable old maid.'

Lydia Bolsover smiled slightly, and, pausing in her work, looked through the open lattice up the long village street, with its sheltering lines of spreading lime trees clothed in all the beauty of early summer. As she looked, she pictured her future, a long, dreary, monotonous vista spent in teaching in the dull red brick school, and in eating her heart out for a fuller existence. Life contained no bright prospect for the schoolmistress of Waveney.

'There's a stranger coming down the street, mother,—a young man,—and he's making for our gate. It must be Doctor Holgate,' she said quickly, and then serenely resumed her sewing, amused at the flutter the intelligence caused her mother. Miss Bolsover's self-possession was very perfect.

Presently Patty, a soft-faced, rather clumsy-looking girl, who had come from Ainsborough workhouse to the schoolhouse as a first place, awkwardly enough showed Doctor Holgate into the sitting-room.

Miss Bolsover did not rise, only lifted her head and bowed gravely and distantly. Mrs. Bolsover fussily excused herself from rising, and begged him to be seated.

'My name is Holgate,' said the stranger courteously, and with a slight backwardness of manner,

as if he found himself in an unusual situation. 'I am Doctor Dacre's assistant. Mrs. Dacre has told me you were good enough to say I might call here to see whether you could accommodate me.'

He addressed his remarks to Mrs. Bolsover, but looked at Lydia. It is possible that even in that first moment he recognised in her the stronger nature, and took in the relations which existed between mother and daughter.

Miss Bolsover kept her serene eyes fixed on the seam with which her white fingers were so busily employed, and appeared oblivious of the stranger and his errand, nevertheless she did not miss a word.

'Well, I'm sure, Doctor Holgate, do sit down, please,' said Mrs. Bolsover fussily, delighted to have a new interest in her purposeless life. 'I don't quite know what to say about it. You see, though my daughter has to teach in the school now, we were once in different circumstances. Mr. Bolsover was a solicitor with a large practice in Ainsborough. But for his untimely death we should have been differently placed from what we are now. Wouldn't we, Lyddy?'

'Doctor Holgate's time may be valuable, mamma. We need not inflict our family history upon him,' Lydia answered, and Holgate saw her colour rise. He wondered why he could not help regarding her with interest, she was so quietly handsome, so serene, so ladylike in every particular. Holgate, as we are aware, had small experience of woman-kind; it was thus far to be expected that he should

admire Lydia Bolsover—others did who had seen many fair women. She was certainly not an ordinary-looking woman.

A finer nature, or rather one which had had a different fostering, would have felt something offensive in her manner when she spoke to her mother. It was not entirely respectful, but rather the manner she might adopt towards her scholars. Holgate, however, did not notice it at that time.

‘Well, I was just going to say, when you interrupted me, Lyddy, that we might make a stretch to accommodate you, just to oblige Doctor Dacre. I have a great respect for Doctor Dacre; a most gentlemanly man, Doctor Holgate. I think you will find him that.’

‘I am sure of it, ma’am,’ said Holgate, with a slight smile.

‘And Mrs. Dacre is very nice too in her way, but proud, very proud—money, you know, that’s the secret,’ said Mrs. Bolsover wisely, nodding her head several times. ‘But money isn’t everything, as I say to Lyddy sometimes. Money won’t make a gentleman.’

‘I quite agree with you, ma’am,’ assented Holgate.

‘Well, as I was saying, Doctor Holgate, you’ll find Waveney a very nice place, though I daresay dull enough for a young man. There’s a good deal of stuckupness in it, as Lyddy could tell you. But I daresay you won’t mind that when you have your work to attend to, and you’ll always find—Well, Lyddy, what now?’

Miss Bolsover put down her sewing and lifted her large, calm eyes to Holgate's face. She was very much annoyed, but there was no outward sign. But the children in school knew and dreaded that icy calm. It foreboded a storm.

'My mother is not strong, Doctor Holgate, as you will see,' she said, in her clear, ringing voice. 'You will excuse me if I take part in the conversation. Perhaps, if you tell me what accommodation and attention you would require, I could tell you at once whether we could suit you.'

Holgate bowed, a trifle confusedly. Miss Bolsover's manner was haughty, almost patronizing; he felt that it was condescension for her to entertain his proposal for a moment.

'I have never lived in apartments, Miss Bolsover, but I suppose I would require two rooms, and, as to attention, I should give as little trouble as possible. I hope you will take me in.'

'We have only one maid, and she is not at all experienced; but if you care to give us a trial, we shall do our best for you. We are anxious to let the rooms, because we need the money, Doctor Holgate. It is as well to let you understand that at once.'

Holgate was at a loss what to say; however, after some further talk, the matter was settled, and it was arranged that he should bring his belongings to the cottage on the morrow.

Then Miss Bolsover rang the bell for Patty to show the gentleman out. Mrs. Bolsover's hospitable ideas were shocked at this.

‘Dear me, Lyddy, you might have gone to the door with him yourself, it would have been more neighbourly like,’ she said in a remonstrating voice. ‘He seems a nice decent lad;—though I see plainly enough he isn’t a Holgate of St. Cyrus. They’re all fair, with ruddy skins and auburn hair;—but a nice, decent, civil-spoken young man; don’t you think so, Lyddy?’

‘I don’t think anything about him, mamma. I only hope he’ll pay regularly; that’s the main qualification in a lodger,’ said Miss Bolsover, with a careless yawn.

‘Of course, so it is. Still it makes a difference to have a nice young gentleman coming out and in. I saw him admiring you, Lyddy, more than once.’

‘Nonsense, mamma!’

‘No; it’s true I’m a stupid creature, but I saw that well enough. It mightn’t be a bad thing; for of course some day he’ll have a berth like Doctor Dacre’s, and that wouldn’t be to be despised.’

‘I don’t understand you, mamma,’ said Lydia, though she knew very well what was meant.

‘Oh, don’t you? Well, what if he falls in love with you, Lyddy, as what could be more natural? For you are a good-looking girl, and he’s a fine-looking young man, and you’d be a handsome, well-matched pair.’



CHAPTER IV.

HIS FATHER'S HOME.

'O idle dreams,
That fret my life away !'

DENIS HOLGATE was sitting by the fire in his own room at the schoolhouse on a winter's night. He had had a hard day's work out of doors, and was very tired, as his face betrayed. He was thinking, as he sat there, of what? Seven months ago he had come to Waveney, to enter upon the first stage of his life-work ; and, looking back, what did he see ? It seemed years instead of months since he had left his home in the Tower Hamlets ; and every day he became less and less inclined to think of it as his home. He wondered now that he had so long tolerated his early surroundings. They seemed wretched and even vile in comparison with those of the present. As was perhaps natural, he often compared the ladies with whom he came in contact with the mother and sister he had left in London. Sometimes he found himself contrasting Rhoda with Doctor Dacre's sweet fair-haired eldest

daughter, or with Lydia Bolsover. The result was the thought of Rhoda became repugnant to him. When he remembered her poor, mean, depressed appearance, he wished there was no tie between them. The new life, then, was plainly hardening Denis Holgate. He had got the length of feeling secretly ashamed of his nearest and dearest. He was popular in Waveney. Doctor Dacre, a good-natured, gentle-hearted man, found his new assistant so capable and energetic that he bestowed upon him many a hearty word of commendation. The poorer people adored him ; he was invited in a friendly way to the best houses in the neighbourhood. Perhaps his fine appearance helped him greatly, enhanced as it was by a modest, quiet, unassuming manner, which commended itself to the sensible. But a secret conceit and pride of self were creeping in upon Denis Holgate, as perhaps was natural. He began to think well of himself, to feel that he was making a position, and his day-dreams grew very brilliant. He felt impatient of the dark background made by Hanbury Lane and its memories, he tried to forget it altogether. But, like all other shadows, it was obtrusive in its nature. Sometimes, when he was enjoying himself at a social gathering in some fine house, a sudden picture of the little shop, with its smell of musty provisions, would rise vividly and unpleasantly before him, and he felt ashamed, not of himself, but of his past and all its connections. The loving self-sacrifice his mother had made for him began to lose the beauty and pathos which had

touched him when it was first presented to him. The injustice done to Rhoda also faded away ; he could think of her condition placidly in so far as it affected herself. Hanbury Lane was fit enough for her. Doubtless had these things been set as plainly before him as I have set them down here, he would have been shocked, and would probably have indignantly denied that he ever entertained them. Nevertheless, they did exist, and visited him often in a stealthy, half-whispering kind of way. Unworthy thoughts are not bold just at first. Being unworthy, they sneak into place after the manner of sycophants and time-servers.

Holgate did not fight as he might and ought to have done against these unworthy thoughts. Nay, he rather fostered and encouraged them, until he began to imagine himself wronged by that strange past of his. When he heard others speaking with pride and love of the homes where they had been reared, he felt it hard that his mouth should have to be closed. He felt moved by a desire to go and see his father's early home, but as yet time and opportunity had been lacking for the fulfilment of that desire. He was thinking of his fine connections at St. Cyrus, and indulging in pleasant castle-building, in which he and they were the chief characters concerned, when a little knock came to the door.

'Come in,' he said lazily, and yawning as he spoke. It was cold out of doors ; he hoped no call had come to summon him far abroad. When he looked round he saw Mrs. Bolsover's faded face in

the doorway, her mauve ribbons fluttering airily about her as she advanced with her dancing step into the room.

‘It’s just me, Doctor Holgate. Lyddy’s gone down to Ainsborough to see a friend ; she went by the three fifteen train. Patty has just brought in my tea, so I made bold to come and see if you’d drink a cup with me. Do ; I can’t bear to eat by myself, it’s so lonesome.’

‘I shall be only too glad. I’m feeling uncommonly lazy and sleepy, Mrs. Bolsover,’ answered Holgate pleasantly. ‘Shall I come now?’

‘Yes, before the muffins get cold. Don’t you notice an improvement in Patty’s muffins lately, Doctor Holgate?’ asked Mrs. Bolsover, as she led the way across the little hall to her own sitting-room. ‘That’s Lyddy ; she’s been superintending Patty this while.’

‘Indeed ! it is very good of Miss Bolsover to take trouble with Patty. I *have* noticed an improvement lately,’ answered Holgate, as he took his seat by the cosy fire, quite unconscious of Mrs. Bolsover’s keen scrutiny. The good lady had an object in inviting Holgate to a private tea-drinking in her daughter’s absence. She wished to find out whether there was likely to be anything between the two. The courtship which she had so confidently expected had advanced very slowly. Indeed, it could hardly be said to have advanced at all. Lydia was very stiff and haughty in her behaviour towards the surgeon, while he seemed to be wholly engrossed with his work. The most

evil-disposed tongue in Waveney could find nothing in the life at the schoolhouse to hang a tale upon. Miss Bolsover was the personification of dignified discretion.

‘And how are you liking Waveney, Doctor Holgate?’ asked Mrs. Bolsover, as she poured out the tea with rather an important air. She was feeling that the strain of Lydia’s severe presence was removed. She could enjoy a real gossipy half-hour with the surgeon without fear of reproof.

‘Oh, I like it fairly well. The people are very kind to me, notably yourself, Mrs. Bolsover.’

‘Oh, it isn’t me, it’s Lyddy. She sees after everything. She’s so managing and clever—such a head, Doctor Holgate, just like her poor father’s! Bolsover was a born lawyer; so is Lyddy, only you see she’s a woman,’ said Mrs. Bolsover, laughing at her own smartness. ‘Don’t you think I’m very well off, to have a girl like Lyddy?’

‘You are indeed,’ answered the surgeon sincerely enough. He honestly admired and respected Lydia Bolsover; had she been less reserved, that feeling might have ripened into something warmer.

‘Well, you’re getting on in Waveney. There’s people that would rather have you than Doctor Dacre. Not that they’ve anything against him,—he’s a gentlemanly man if ever there was one,—but they think you’ve greater ability. I have heard even Lyddy say so, and I guess she knows.’

‘I did not know Miss Bolsover thought so well of me,’ said the surgeon, with a smile. ‘She will have nothing to say to me, as a rule.’

‘Oh, that’s just her way, Doctor Holgate!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bolsover, trembling with pleasurable excitement, for she felt that she had a great deal in her power. ‘I do assure you Lyddy likes—I mean, respects you very much. She was always that still, quiet kind of creature even when she was a little girl. Perhaps too much so, because she thinks I’m silly when I’m only saying what I think. As I say to her sometimes, everybody can’t be like a tightly-corked barrel of ale, else the world ’ll come to an end. But when Lyddy does speak, she speaks to a purpose. She always means what she says.’

‘I am sure of that,’ answered the surgeon rather absently, thinking of something else.

‘And you’re liking Waveney, and Waveney is liking you,’ said Mrs. Bolsover, complacently dropping another lump of sugar into her tea. ‘Have you ever been down at Ainsborough yet?’

‘Not yet.’

‘Ah, well, there ain’t much to see there. It’s a dead-and-alive place—pretty enough in its way though. By the bye, Doctor Holgate, I have always been going to ask if you are a connection of the Holgates of the Abbey—St. Cyrus Abbey. That’s a place now! Have you ever seen it?’

‘No, I have never seen it. Is it very fine?’

‘Isn’t it just fine and no mistake. It’s what they call a show place. There’s an old ruin in the grounds you can see quite well out of the drawing-room window. *Why* they let it stand I don’t know; it was always a perfect eyesore to me;

but there it is, and the family are that proud of it, and that frightened any of the trippers damage it, that they have always a keeper on the watch when there's picnics in the grounds.'

'You have been there then, Mrs. Bolsover?' asked Holgate carelessly, though he was intensely interested.

'There! I should say so; why, my grandmother was housekeeper there for over forty years. I was often at the Abbey when I was quite a little gel, and the old squire, Sir Fulke, used to notice me that kindly on account of my curls and my blue eyes, he said,' simpered Mrs. Bolsover. 'I was often at it, too, when I grew up, though never of course after I was married to Mr. Bolsover,—of course my position was different then; but my sister Cicely was stillroom-maid, and was married at the Abbey to Sutton, who has a place of his own now, and doing well. They keep the "Boot and Shoe" at Crosshaven, and if you're ever that way, Dr. Holgate, and call in, you'll find a warm welcome from Cicely Sutton. A better-hearted creature never breathed; though, of course, being married to Sutton, she never had my advantages, and has no refinement.'

'Who lives at St. Cyrus now?'

'Old Lady Holgate. She's a Tartar. If I'd time, Dr. Holgate, I'd tell you better stories, and truer ones, too, than you ever read in a novel. So you're no connection? Well, the name is not that uncommon. And Sir Fulke, he isn't strong. It's fast living that has brought him down, for he was

once a perfect giant. There were three brothers, you know, but they're both dead, and only Sir Fulke left.'

'What became of the other two?'

'The third one, Mr. Bevis Holgate, went abroad, to Bombay, I think, and married a young widow with a little girl. Both of them were drowned in a boat on a river there, and the poor little thing came home to the Abbey, though of course she hadn't any claim on her stepfather's relations.'

'What became of the second brother?'

'Ah, that was a sadder story still! Mr. Denis—he was called after my lady his mother's Irish kinsfolk—was a favourite with everybody. You should hear Cicely talk of him! She was still-room-maid at the Abbey when Mr. Denis fell in love with and married Anne Braithwaite, his mother's own maid. *That* was a turn-up and no mistake, Dr. Holgate. Cicely said Lady Holgate would never hold up her head again, and she never has. Not that she has ever relented her harsh treatment of Mr. Denis and his wife, who was a handsome and a good girl, for I knew her myself through Cicely living there.'

'Then you don't know what became of him?'

'Nobody does, except that he died away in some poor place in London. Whether he had any family or not nobody knows. If Sir Fulke were to die, it would need to be inquired into before St. Cyrus could go to any far-away folks.'

Had Mrs. Bolsover been less absorbed in her own reminiscences of St. Cyrus, she must have

noticed a peculiar expression cross the face of Denis Holgate. It was an immense relief to him at that moment when Patty entered, saying there was a message come from Redacre, a little hamlet several miles distant, on the road to Ainsborough.

‘Now I call that aggravating!’ said Mrs. Bolsover regretfully. ‘Just when we were having such a fine chat. Redacre at this time of night! Nobody can say you eat the bread of idleness, doctor.’

‘No; but I like my work, and have no inclination to grumble,’ said Holgate, with a smile. ‘Good evening, Mrs. Bolsover. I assure you I have enjoyed my tea-drinking immensely.’

‘I’m glad to hear it. But not a word to Lyddy, or she’ll go on awful at me. She’s that fussy and particular, you can’t think. I’ll tell her myself by degrees.’

‘All right; honour bright,’ said Holgate, laughing, as he went to get on his riding-boots before going up to the stables.

It was a fine, clear winter night, with a full moon high in the frosty sky and a flood of glorious light lying upon the earth. A splendid night for a ride, and Holgate felt his pulses tingle and the blood course swiftly through his veins, as he urged the cob to a brisk trot along the hard, clean highway to Ainsborough. Mrs. Bolsover’s gossip had awakened in him a new vein of thought, and had suggested to him a possibility of which he had never dreamed even in his wildest imaginings. If her statements were all true, then there was only

an ailing man between him and St. Cyrus! It was a strange, wild, exciting thought, with which he felt himself almost entirely carried away. He was astonished when he came within sight of the low-lying, whitewashed cottages of Redacre, hardly realizing that he had already ridden more than four miles. By a strong effort he banished all distracting thoughts from his mind, and when he entered the house, where a woman was in sore need of his aid, he was again the calm, confident, self-reliant surgeon, who knew his work and did it well. A steady nerve and a wonderful coolness were characteristics of Holgate, and were the main elements of his success. He never allowed himself to be daunted or discouraged; he did his work to the best of his ability, and expected good results. Thus any serious case which had been entrusted to him since his settlement in Waveney had been a complete success. His self-confidence carried him through where a man of more ability but less courage might have failed. He was detained about half an hour in the cottage, and when he was mounting his horse at the door he put a question to the woman's husband, who had been watching the animal.

‘How far is it to St. Cyrus Abbey from here, Craddock?’

‘A matter o’ twa mile, sur, a mile an’ a quarter to t’ gates, an’ then th’ approach,’ answered the man. ‘There’s a near cut to walk through them woods,’ he said, pointing to the dark belt of trees on the other side of the meadow which skirted the

road. 'That's th' way I goo to my work; 'tain't more'n three-quarters.'

'Do you work at the Abbey, Craddock?'

'Ay. I'm one o' th' woodmen; an' my feyther wur afore me, an' his'n afore him. We've allus served th' Abbey, sur.'

'Good masters to serve, I suppose?' said Holgate carelessly.

'Wur wonce, noan noo. Ivvrything's ground down. The way Sir Fulke's hackin' an' sellin' t' timber, sur, 's a disgrace to mortal mon. If it wur known wheer the heir wur it 'ud be stopped maybe. There'll be a cry after him, likely, when Sir Fulke dies, but then it'll be ower late. Ivvrything's turned into cash. The very vegetables is sent to Covent Garden, an' t' table at th' Abbey ain't what it wur. But I'm keepin' yo, sur?'

'Not at all. I am sorry to hear such poor reports of the old place. It must be grieving to such as you, who have been about it so long.'

'Ay is it; tho' maybe I han't noan reet to complain, so lang's I git my money regler. It all come, sur, of owd Sir Fulke marryin' that Irish vixen—beggin' yor parding, sur, but ivvry won knaws th' owd un's a Tartar. There's noan good i' th' Irish, gentle or simple, a greedy, graspin', ill-conditioned lot.'

'Come, come, that's too sweeping an assertion, Craddock,' said the surgeon good-humouredly. 'But there, I must go. Good-night. Remember my directions about your wife's medicines. I'll ride over in the morning.'

And with a nod the surgeon turned his horse's head and rode away, not towards Waveney, but in the direction of the Abbey gates. He would at least have a look at the entrance, he told himself; another day he hoped to obtain a glimpse of the house. But when he reached the noble and imposing entrance he found the gates wide open, and, without a moment's hesitation, urged the cob into the dim recesses of the avenue. The trees, though leafless, grew so closely together, and had such giant boughs overlacing overhead, that only a stray gleam of moonlight penetrated the black darkness. When he had gone about half-way down, Holgate saw lights gleaming in the distance, without doubt the windows of the house. His curiosity, now grown insatiable, urged him forward, and a few seconds more brought him within sight of the grey old pile. He reined the cob, and sat looking with a strange deep interest on that noble home, whose towers and turrets, green with moss and ivy of a century's growth, stood out in sharp, clear beauty against the cold wintry sky. An air of repose, of serene and undisturbed stillness, seemed to envelop it, the dignity and grace of age seemed to dwell serenely upon it; it was grand, imposing, even affecting to Denis Holgate. Beyond the more modern building, the ruin of the old Abbey, so contemptuously alluded to by Mrs. Bolsover, was plainly discernible in the brightness of the moonlight. An exquisite and touching picture, standing solemnly among its ghostly elms, it seemed to embody the spirit and romance of a long gone past.

This, then, was St. Cyrus; his father's early home, and his by right of heritage. One day he might be master here. The thought was overpowering. Holgate took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his brow. He was intensely excited; had any one come suddenly upon him, asking the cause of his intrusion, he could not have given a coherent answer. But no one disturbed him; he was allowed to go as he had come, unseen. Henceforth the interest of life for Denis Holgate would centre in one word—St. Cyrus! As he rode through the gates again, a sudden and unwelcome vision rose up before him. He saw the little shop in Hanbury Lane, the poor, plain living-room occupied by his mother and Rhoda. He seemed to see Rhoda's dull face in its frame of tawny hair looking mockingly into his. How hideous it all was! Why could he not forget it? Why should these past phantoms (already Holgate had separated them from all connection with himself) rise up before him in the very moments of his highest self-exultation? What link could there be between Hanbury Lane and St. Cyrus Abbey? Surely none.

As Holgate rode towards Waveney once more he saw the figure of a woman walking quickly along the moonlit road. He would have ridden past her had not something familiar struck him. He slightly slackened rein and looked again. Then the woman turned her head and stood still. He saw then that it was Lydia Bolsover.



CHAPTER V.

BEYOND RECALL.

‘I, too, at love’s brim
Touched the sweet.’

BROWNING.

‘**M**ISS BOLSOVER!’ he exclaimed in surprise. ‘I scarcely expected to see you here.’

‘No, yet the explanation is simple enough,’ Lydia Bolsover answered. ‘I missed the last train to Waveney—not *my* fault, you may be very sure, Doctor Holgate. So there was nothing for it but to walk. I only parted from my friend at the Abbey gates.’

‘Are you not tired?’ he asked.

‘Not at all; I am very strong, and am seldom tired. One is oftener wearied in mind than in body, I think; at least I am.’

‘Are you? You will let me walk Harold slowly by your side? I know you would not mount him. I am in no hurry. We may as well walk together.’

‘Provided we do not bore each other,’ said Lydia Bolsover, lifting her fine eyes with a little gleam

to the surgeon's handsome face. He was struck at that moment by her beauty. She *was* beautiful in her way. There was a fine colour in her cheek, her eyes shone, every movement was instinct with the grace of health and strength. Her attire, as usual, was faultless. Holgate did not know what she wore; he only knew that the whole was very pleasant to the eye. He was inclined to be very friendly with her. She had opportunely interrupted a very unpleasant vein of thought.

'Have you been at Ainsborough too?' she asked presently.

'I? Oh no. I had a patient to see at Redacre, and just cantered along the road a bit, not being in a hurry. It is a fine night.'

'Very fine,' answered Miss Bolsover; after which interesting remark there was a pause. She was not a talker, she would not make conversation even to please a handsome young man like Denis Holgate. Lydia Bolsover was at least free from affectation or coquetry. As a rule, the male youth of Waveney professed a dislike for her. She was too straightforward and matter-of-fact for them. She made them painfully conscious of any little weakness they might possess. Yet she never said anything disagreeable or unpleasant. There is a silence, however, which is quite as expressive and much more aggravating even than plain speech. This silence was a characteristic of Miss Bolsover.

'I have been under your mother's roof for seven months, Miss Bolsover, and you and I are like strangers to each other,' said Holgate, expressing a

thought which had sometimes been in his mind of late.

‘Yes; and what of that? We are civil to each other when we do speak, which might not be the case were we better acquainted.’

‘What am I to infer from that?’ asked Holgate laughingly. ‘Am I a source of annoyance to you?’

Miss Bolsover laughed also.

‘Why should you be? You are very harmless.’

‘You allude to me as if I were on a footing with your mother’s canary and her pet cat. I think I have heard you say they are harmless,’ said Holgate a trifle dryly. He did not relish the treatment he received at the hands of the schoolmistress. The smiles and sweet words of the Waveney young ladies had given him an exalted idea of his own charms. Why did Lydia Bolsover regard him with such tranquil contempt? Because she was different from other girls she interested him. He felt that he should like to see those cold, proud lips put on a smile for him. It would be a triumph to ruffle that serene composure with a breath of tenderness. He looked at her face, and fancied he felt his heart beat quicker at sight of it. Could he be in love with Lydia Bolsover? The question was interesting and fascinating to him as well as to other young men.

‘I am very fond of Tommy and Jeremiah,’ said Miss Bolsover, alluding to the canary and the cat.

‘And if I am harmless like them you might extend that fondness to me, eh?’ asked Holgate, catching her humour, but bending his handsome

head a little towards her with a touch of eagerness on his face. It pleased him to see the swift, hot colour rise in her cheek. She was not so cold, so impregnable as outward seeming indicated. Nay, if there was any truth in the adage concerning still waters, there must be a very passionate heart beating in Lydia Bolsover's breast. The day came when Denis Holgate wished he had left that too passionate heart dormant, when he would have given worlds to recall even this one night.

'Let us be friends, Miss Bolsover,' he said eagerly. 'I am sure we have a great deal in common. We both hate Waveney, for one thing.'

'Why should *you* hate Waveney, Doctor Holgate? Your position cannot be compared with mine,' said Lydia Bolsover bitterly.

'It's a mean, stuck-up little place, and there is no scope for a man in it,' he said loftily. 'When I see the way you are treated my blood boils. There is not a woman in Waveney to be compared to you for a moment.'

It was a hastily uttered, imprudent speech, exaggerated too; but to Lydia Bolsover it was wholly sweet. She turned her head away, and her eyes shone again. Holgate caught a glimpse of the exquisite blush which mantled her cheek. It told its own tale; and again he imagined himself in love. He took her hand and drew it within his arm. Prudence had fled; he was overcome by the sweet, dangerous impulses of the moment.

'Let us be friends, Lydia,' he said softly, and with a rare protecting tenderness which became

him well,—‘dear, true friends, until we can be something closer. You must have known for a long time how much I have admired and sympathized with you. We can be a comfort and a help to each other while we are in Waveney.’

Lydia Bolsover allowed him to retain her hand, but she turned her deep, calm eyes full upon his face, as if seeking to read his very soul. She loved him with a strange, strong, passionate love, the first-fruits of her heart; therefore she could not say him nay.

‘You are certain it is not pity? I do not need pity. I am very well able to fight my own battle,’ she said, almost rebelliously.

‘Yes, yes! It is not pity—it is sympathy and love you need,’ said Holgate soothingly, as he might have spoken to a child. Then, to his astonishment, she burst into tears. What could he do then but place an arm about her, and whisper sweet words of endearment to her, which were very real to him at the moment.

So Lydia Bolsover threw off her cold reserve, and became a warm-hearted, loving woman,—willing to place her life in the hands of Denis Holgate. How had it come about? I do not know. We see such instances of a strong nature surrendering to a weak one—it is one of the mysteries which we cannot unravel. It was a curious love-making,—a thing undreamed of an hour ago by either, and a thing, moreover, which, before another hour went by, would be regretted by one. Denis Holgate was not more touched with love for Lydia Bolsover

than for any other woman. He was in an excited mood; feeling had gained the mastery, and for lack of a little prudence and self-control he had woven about his life the meshes of a net from which he would find it difficult to escape. Lydia Bolsover was in earnest,—she did nothing by halves.

Holgate was guilty of another indiscretion that night; he confided to the companion of his walk his connection with St. Cyrus. Perhaps that was scarcely to be wondered at, seeing his mind was so full of it; yet that also would yet occasion him the bitterest regret.

‘So you are really the son of Mr. Denis Holgate, of whom I have often heard my mother speak!’ said Lydia Bolsover in the greatness of her astonishment. ‘How strange that you should come to Waveney, so near St. Cyrus! What do you mean to do?’

‘Wait in the meantime,’ said Holgate, with an affectation of carelessness he did not feel.

‘Wait! I could not wait,’ said Lydia. ‘Were I you, I should go up to St. Cyrus and claim relationship with Lady Holgate and Sir Fulke. Why not? They dared not turn you out of your own door.’

Her eyes flashed; Holgate was astonished at the vehemence with which she spoke.

‘It is hardly my door yet,’ he answered dryly. ‘Probably they would resent my intrusion.’

‘They have not a reputation for amiability certainly, but I should glory in their anger, if they exhibited anger. They may be very proud, they

may be ashamed of you, but if you can prove your identity, yours would be the triumph. Is your mother alive?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why didn’t you bring her here with you?’

He chafed under her questioning, forgetting that he had just given her a certain right to ask what she pleased.

‘What should I have done with her here?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps it would not have been convenient. Have you any sisters?’

‘Yes, one.’

‘What is her name? Is she like you?’

‘Her name is Rhoda, and she is *not* like me,’ he answered shortly.

Lydia became silent then. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, her thoughts became a golden web. Looking forward, what did she see? A carriage with a coronet, and she within it; Waveney bending low before the lady of St. Cyrus. The vision pleased Lydia Bolsover. A smile wreathed her lips. She lifted her head and looked with shy pride into the handsome face by her side.

‘One day you and I shall be quits with Waveney,’ she said. ‘You are sure you will not cast me off with the other attributes of the old life when the time comes for you to enter upon the new?’ She looked lovely as she uttered these words, her fingers pressed lightly the arm to which they clung. Remember Holgate’s ignorance of and susceptibility to the charms of a pretty woman. He was very young too, and fancied himself in love.

‘I shall never do that,’ he answered earnestly, as a lover ought. ‘Whatever happens, I shall always be the same to you.’

‘You will know, at anyrate, that it was *you* I cared for and not your position,’ she whispered softly, and Holgate stooped and kissed her almost passionately. When she became sweet and tender she was wholly irresistible. Link by link he bound upon himself his chain of bondage.

‘It will not do to let Waveney see any difference in our relations to each other. It is a nest of gossip as it is; we need not give it another tit-bit in the meantime,’ he said after a pause. ‘Do you not think so?’

‘I am not a fool; I know Waveney better than you,’ Lydia answered shortly.

‘Nor your mother, Lydia, though she is a most estimable woman,’ continued Holgate a trifle nervously. ‘But I fear she could not keep our secret.’

‘Our secret shall be kept as long as it is necessary; do not fear,’ she said quickly. ‘I am not a hare-brained girl who cannot hold her tongue where a man is concerned. I think, whatever my faults, I have a little prudence. I know that we must wait perhaps years, but I do not mind. My way of life has taught me to be patient, not to expect too much, but, like Shylock, I hope for my pound of flesh some day. I have some accounts to settle in Waveney.’

Holgate felt uncomfortable in the extreme. She spoke quietly, yet with a deliberate bitterness

which chilled him. It flashed across him that this woman, who might be true and faithful in friendship or in love, would be a bitter foe. Already he wished he had left her in her cold reserve, that he had not bridged the barrier between them.

‘It may be years, as you say,’ he repeated, but did not specify what event was to be thus postponed. ‘I have a position to make, and I may never be any nearer St. Cyrus than I am now. My uncle may live for years; he may even marry, and have an heir of his own.’

‘It might happen, but it is not likely. They say he cared for that Indian girl who came home to become his ward; his brother’s step-child. She would have nothing to say to him, and in revenge they married her to a man she hated. Poor thing! they say she is very unhappy, but she has a great position and plenty of means. I confess I know of no misery for which these are not an antidote. It is degrading to be poor and obscure. There is nothing I would not do to attain a position of influence.’

‘Yet not long ago, Lydia, you did not turn away from me, though you thought me only a poor assistant. You are not consistent,’ said Holgate, with a laugh.

‘No, you are right; I am not consistent. Probably by to-morrow I should have come to the conclusion that I was a fool, and should likely have told you so,’ she said, smiling. She felt very happy, and also elated.

They were now entering the picturesque village.

She looked about her with a kind of quiet triumph. She was the chosen love of the heir of St. Cyrus; what would the jealous, narrow-minded clique, who made the humiliations of her life, say to that when it became known? Holgate's thoughts were different. Already he regretted his haste.

'Do you know that never until to-night have I been glad that I am a woman,' she said, and her lip trembled. 'I have hated and despised myself, and wished myself anything rather than what I am.'

'And what has wrought the change, Lydia?' Holgate asked, touched by her complete surrender.

'Because I have learned that I am not distasteful to you. You have raised my self-respect,' she said, and again the brilliant colour dyed her cheek. It was marvellous the change love had wrought in this girl. Her face was absolutely glorified by it. Holgate could not but be proud of it, and yet there was an element of doubt, even of fear, in his pride. The love he had so lightly won, and which perhaps he should not long care to keep, would be very exacting, he foresaw.

He had never yet thought of marriage seriously in relation to himself, yet now he was pledged to a woman of whom he knew very little. What, then, could be the issue? Time alone would disclose.



CHAPTER VI.

REGRET AND HOPE.

‘Youth hath a restless heart,
And thinks to drain life’s goblet at a draught.’

‘**C**OME in here, Denis ; I wish to speak to you,’ said Doctor Dacre, intercepting Holgate one evening as he was leaving the surgery.

Holgate followed the doctor into his library with a slight feeling of curiosity. His manner was kind as usual, but a trifle serious.

‘Ay, shut the door,’ he said, when they entered. ‘How long have you been with me now?’

‘Fifteen months, sir,’ Denis answered.

‘So long as that?’ said the doctor in mild surprise. ‘How the time flies! Well, Denis, I think it quite time you made a change.’

Holgate reddened a little, fancying he was about to receive his dismissal.

‘If you have no longer any need for my services, Doctor Dacre, of course I must make a change,’ he replied stiffly.

A genial smile shone upon the face of the elder

man, and his blue eyes twinkled at the tone of offended dignity.

‘My need is just as great as it was when you came to me,’ he said quietly. ‘But it is time you sought an advance on your present position. Your abilities are beyond Waveney. Have you no desire to rise in your profession?’

Holgate’s face flushed again, this time with the flush of conscious shame. For many months his dreams had been of a future in which the work—the preparation for which had cost so much—had played no part whatever. His friend misunderstood his heightened colour, and hastened to relieve his apparent embarrassment.

‘I will speak more plainly, Denis,’ he said kindly. ‘You have been invaluable to me while you have been with me, and have saved me not only much hard work, but many an anxious hour. Were I to consult my own wishes, believe me, I should not be speaking to you now. But I shall not be selfish. I know of an opening in which my influence might be of considerable use to you. I suppose you are quite willing to go, provided you are to gain any advantage by it?’

‘I am certainly obliged to you, Doctor Dacre,’ said Denis Holgate sincerely. ‘Of course I am anxious to rise in the world, and in my profession.’

‘I thought so. I would have been disappointed in you otherwise. A young man without ambition is a sad spectacle,’ said the doctor, nodding his head. ‘Well, an old friend of mine has been in practice for many years at Crosshaven, a little

fishing village on the coast a few miles from Southport. It is a good berth, Denis, for he has, I believe, also a consulting practice in Southport. I am right in saying his income during the last ten years has not been under a thousand. He is an old man now, and not able to compass his work even with the aid of an assistant. He wants a partner, with a view to a successor. We had some talk about you when I was down a few weeks ago, and we have had some correspondence on the subject since. What would you think of a partnership with my friend?’

‘It would depend on the terms, sir,’ said Holgate, recalling his mother’s injunctions the last night he had spent in Hanbury Lane.

‘I have considered that too. You will allow me to help you, Denis. It would be a pleasure to me.’

‘But, sir, I have no claim upon you.’

‘Why not? I like you, and you have faithfully done your duty while with me. I am a rich man. It will cost me no self-denial to advance a few hundreds, and you can repay me as circumstances allow.’

It was the offer of a generous, large-hearted man, and Holgate could not but be touched by it.

‘If you will allow me, Doctor Dacre, I shall communicate with my friends at once,’ he said at length.

‘Certainly. Is your father living?’

‘No, only my mother.’

‘Pardon the question, but will circumstances enable her to help you?’

‘I believe so. I think she could give me the money.’

‘Ah, well, in that case, of course, I shall not press the matter. It is for you and her to settle. I wonder you have not brought her down for a breath of our fine Waveney air. If you decide to go to Crosshaven, no doubt she will make her home with you,—that is, unless you marry. By the bye, Denis, Mrs. Dacre was telling me only yesterday that there is a talk in the place of some courting between you and Miss Bolsover. Any truth in it, eh?’

‘Waveney is full of such gossip, sir,’ said Holgate, with a laugh. ‘They have reported my courtship about half a dozen times.’

‘Ah, well, you might do worse. She is a prudent, good girl, and would make a fine wife for any man. Poor thing, she will soon be lonely enough; the old lady can’t possibly outlive the winter. If you would like a few days, Denis, to run up and consult your mother, you may take them. A thing can be so much better discussed verbally than in writing. Anyhow, I think you should consider the thing favourably. It is a thoroughly good opening, and the place is growing as well as its big neighbour along the shore. You would find Doctor Radcliffe a generous and considerate partner. He is a fine old man.’

‘I will think well of it, and I am deeply obliged to you, Doctor Dacre,’ repeated Holgate sincerely.

Then they shook hands and parted for the night.

It was now the month of October, and the days were short, cold, and dreary; winter had stolen a march upon the earth. A premature storm had whirled the leaves from the trees, and they rustled under Holgate's feet as he walked slowly along the highway to Ainsborough. It was his tea-hour, but he wished to be alone for a little while to think out this thing. He knew very well that Lydia Bolsover would be waiting for him, watching, probably, with these large, calm eyes of hers through the drawn curtains of the sitting-room. Inch by inch their intimacy had increased, and it was Patty who had let out the secret to Waveney. She had not been slow to observe the change which had gradually crept over the household. Mrs. Bolsover was now entirely confined to her own room. She slept a great deal, and required quiet; what more natural, then, than that Holgate and Miss Bolsover should spend their evenings together? Patty, dull in many things, picked up certain signs and understood them quick enough. She saw that there was love between her mistress and the surgeon. Was it to be expected that she should keep such a secret? It was confided by degrees to her mother, who duly, and with a strong sense of the importance of her news, imparted it to Mrs. Wagram. Mrs. Wagram, having a personal dislike to Miss Bolsover, delighted to hear of this departure from the customary bounds of her prudence. If Miss Bolsover sat alone in the

surgeon's parlour with him in the evenings, she argued, she was guilty of indiscretion, and ought to be rebuked. Such conduct did not befit one who was the guide and pattern to the youth of Waveney. Lydia Bolsover knew quite well that she and Holgate had become the talk of Waveney, but that mattered nothing to her. She was happy with a wild, deep, intense happiness, born perhaps of the very reserve and self-containedness of her nature. She had given her whole heart to Holgate, and, though in comparison with her he was a cool lover, he as yet satisfied her completely. He found her a sympathetic and deeply interested companion and listener to his talk, which was apt to run in a grandiloquent strain. So matters stood seven months after that memorable walk between Redacre and Waveney. So they stood to-night as Holgate reviewed them in his solitary walk. The idea of leaving Waveney commended itself to him; he had grown tired of his way of life. He had grown tired, too, of the constant companionship of Lydia Bolsover. Her adoration of him wearied him, thus showing that his heart had not awakened in response to hers. She alluded at times to the future they were to spend together; he never did. The thought was not pleasant to him; the word wife applied to her had no charm or sweetness. In a word, he had grown weary, and repented him of his choice. I want to be just to Holgate, though his conduct was mean. It was rather the fruit of thoughtlessness than of any deliberate desire to deceive and make a woman

unhappy. He had found the companionship of Lydia Bolsover a pleasant change and relief from the monotony of his work, and had availed himself of it, saying sometimes things which had only their being on his lips, though they went to the heart of another. He had allowed himself to drift with the current of events, and now, when a prospect of a change was placed immediately before him, he was conscious of an intense feeling of relief which was almost gladness. It did not occur to him that what he thought of so lightly and indifferently might be a matter of life and death to the woman with whose heart he had played. Holgate's deepest feelings had never yet been touched; out of his own agony there would yet arise a sympathy and compassion for that of others. He was yet only on the threshold of life, a young man, vain, full of self-glorifications and conceits, without any thought of life's higher meanings or of manhood's great and noble aims. He had not advanced a step towards that noble life in Waveney, yet these months had their uses; they were like some apparently useless, yet really indispensable parts of his education.

Occupied with these thoughts, Holgate walked steadily along the high road in the gathering twilight until he came within sight of Redacre and the dark outline of the St. Cyrus woods in the distance. Then his thoughts underwent a change, and St. Cyrus, with all its attendant day-dreams, became all-absorbing. When he came to the stile which gave admittance to the footpath through the

grounds, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should strike into it. As he did so he had no definite purpose in his mind, except perhaps a stronger desire than usual to look upon the old house. The footpath across the meadow merged at length into a broad, well-kept walk, intersecting the trees which grew so densely in the thicket. There were evidences here of Sir Fulke's greed of gold; some of the noblest trees were felled to the ground, and great trunks lay piled side by side already marked for sale. Holgate remembered Craddock's words about the heir, and his brow grew dark as he looked. He had got the length of thinking of the place as his, and he resented the fallen timber. Yet how could he interfere or even advance the smallest claim to a stick or stone upon the place? By and by he emerged from the wild depths of the wood to the well-kept park, which as yet had not suffered from Sir Fulke. How majestic and noble looked these spreading oaks and elms standing like sentinels against the sky, their branches scarcely stirring in the still night air! The silence was absolutely oppressive, the soft turf sent forth no echo of the solitary stroller's steps; he felt almost like a thief in the night. Once more Denis Holgate found himself within sight of the Abbey, its lighted windows shining like stars in the darkness. He walked nearer, his heart beating, his eyes filled with intense, eager interest. Again everything but St. Cyrus was forgotten. As he was about to step on to the wide sweep of gravel before the ancient doorway, it was thrown open,

and a flood of light shone out upon the darkness. He saw a man-servant in dark livery peer anxiously into the night, and stretch out his hand, probably to ascertain whether it rained. Presently the sound of wheels broke the stillness, and a carriage was driven rapidly round from the direction of the stables and drawn up at the door. Holgate drew back into the shadow of the trees, forgetting that he was spying upon the actions of others. He saw the footman spread a strip of matting from within the entrance hall, and immediately an elderly lady, closely muffled in wraps, came out and entered the carriage. Holgate could see that her figure was noble and commanding, he could hear the rustle of her silken train as it swept the carriage step. The servant stood by the open door a few seconds still, and until a second figure appeared; a young lady this time, with a graceful, girlish figure, clad in a shimmer of white lace and silk. Her wrap hung loosely about her shoulders, her head was bare, and as she stepped out the full light from the lamp above the door fell upon her face,—a face so exquisitely lovely that to Holgate it appeared like that of an angel.

‘Do hurry, Winifred!’ a quick, imperious voice said from within the carriage. ‘We shall certainly be late.’

‘Oh no, dear grandmamma! It will not take us an hour to drive to Rokeby,’ the younger lady answered back as she stepped into the carriage.

A moment more, and it was driven rapidly away, leaving Holgate feeling like one in a dream. He

could not recall one feature of that face, but its expression was indelibly engraven on his heart. It was one of unspeakable sadness. What did it mean? What dark shadow had fallen across this young life on its sweet threshold? Why should such a fair young creature wear an expression of deep and anxious care? Could this be the orphan whose guardians had so poorly fulfilled their trust? Holgate was devoured with curiosity. He seemed to be in an unreal world, full of phantoms which he perpetually pursued. He seemed to live two lives, even to have two personalities. When the carriage had disappeared in the dark shadows of the avenue, he stepped from his shelter and boldly approached the open door. He hardly knew what he wished or purposed. He was standing in the full glare of light, looking with deep interest into the magnificent entrance hall, the pride and glory of St. Cyrus, when the footman, stepping out to shut the door, caught sight of him.

‘Hulloa!’ he said brusquely; but, observing that the intruder wore the garb and had the appearance of a gentleman, he touched his forelock. ‘Beg parding, sir; I took you for one as had no business ’ere. What can I do for you?’

Holgate was a trifle confused, but succeeded in regaining his composure.

‘Can I see Sir Fulke Holgate?’ he asked, and, being inwardly excited, his voice took rather a nervous tone.

‘I’ll see. If you’ll step this way, sir, I’ll tell

Sir Fulke. He's at dinner. I hope you can wait a minute or so ?'

'Surely.'

'Then step this way, sir, if you please.'

Holgate followed the man across the hall and up the broad, richly-carpeted steps to the first floor. He was curiously calm, though he felt that he had reached a crisis whose issues might change the whole current of his existence. He was shown into the library, which had only one dim shaded lamp burning on an antique marble centre table. It only served to heighten the sombre gloom of that magnificent and noble room, the finest in the Abbey. Holgate's feet sank in the rich, soft pile of the Persian rugs scattered over the polished floor. He felt awed ; a sense of smallness and insignificance stole upon him. The place was so great, so imposing, so different from anything he had ever seen ! Even here Hanbury Lane came to the front. How painful, how absurd in the might of its contrast did that poor home seem to him now !

'What name shall I say, sir ?' asked the man, lingering at the door.

Holgate started.

'Oh, no name. Simply say that a gentleman wishes to see Sir Fulke at his leisure.'

The man bowed, and closed the door.

Holgate said, 'at his leisure,' but he hoped that his time for thought would be short. He had placed himself in an extraordinary position, he had an ordeal of no common kind to face. Yet he was curiously calm. He walked leisurely about the fine

old room, drinking in every detail. The volumes which lined the shelves from ceiling to floor were priceless, he knew, and the other articles rare and valuable of their kind. He even fingered the magnificent silk hangings at the wide windows, and looked with interest at the quaint brass clock and candelabra above the superb fireplace. Nothing escaped his eye. His interest was that of one who feels a right in what the eye falls upon. Only one very slender barrier stood between him and his. He was thus occupied when the door was abruptly opened, and some one entered. Holgate was at the far end of the room, and he turned round, feeling the hot blood surging through his veins. In the intensity of his excitement his lip even quivered. Nevertheless he endeavoured to command himself, and advanced towards the middle of the room, where the lamp shone upon the polished surface of the marble table. There he found himself face to face with Sir Fulke Holgate, ninth baronet of St. Cyrus. He was a tall, spare, attenuated figure, attired in half dress, a black velvet jacket and vest. His face was dark and sallow, with high cheek-bones and piercingly keen blue eyes. The heavy masses of his reddish-brown hair were carefully arranged above his high white brow. He was a striking-looking man, though not handsome, an aristocrat without doubt, carrying it in every movement, in the very gesture of his long, thin, white hand, as it lightly touched the table, while with a very slight bow he looked inquiringly at the stranger.

‘Sir, what can I do for you?’ he said in indolent tones, which had a touch of hauteur.

Denis Holgate’s tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. He began to tremble in every limb. Sir Fulke saw his agitation, and pointed to a chair.

‘Pray be seated,’ he said courteously, though not cordially; then he repeated the question, ‘What can I do for you?’

‘My name is Holgate,’ faltered the surgeon at length,—‘Denis Holgate.’

As he spoke his confidence returned. He drew himself up and fixed his eye calmly on the unruffled countenance of Sir Fulke.

‘Well, Mr. Holgate, what can I do for you?’ repeated Sir Fulke, without the slightest change in his expression or voice.

‘I am the son of your brother, Sir Fulke. I am your nephew, Denis Holgate.’

A peculiar gleam shot through the cold eyes of Sir Fulke, and a slow and chilling smile crept up to his long, thin mouth.

‘Well, what more, my young friend? Say what you have to say. My dessert is waiting me in the dining-room.’

‘I live in Waveney. I have been there for more than a year. I have often come up here; but only to-night did I find courage to come in. You must believe me, Sir Fulke. I can prove my identity though you look so incredulous.’

Sir Fulke turned leisurely upon his heel and pulled the bell-rope beside the fireplace. In an

instant the servant entered the room, looking scared, for the summons had been unusually loud.

‘Show this person down-stairs, Evans,’ he said calmly, and, without further word or look to Holgate, passed before them out of the room and returned to finish his dessert.





CHAPTER VII.

‘HIS LITTLE LASS.’

‘Two travellers in life’s way :
One tottering greyly on the brink
Of the hereafter. The other sweet and young,
With childhood’s sunshine on her golden head,
And childhood’s love and trust within her soul’



LOW wind was sobbing on the marshes, out at sea there were little crests of foam on the waves, the sky was lowering down long before the darkening, a cloud hung heavily over Lytham and St. Ann’s, but a clear still brightness crept out from the ragged fringes on the western horizon and touched Crosshaven with a solemn and exquisite light. It was the afternoon of a bleak March day, and a storm was brewing on the sea. The air was keen and cold, the low wind had a biting edge which might almost chill the marrow in one’s bones. Captain Silas felt its bitter touch as he sat on the oak settle by his kitchen fire, toasting his muffin for tea. ‘Sure it’s cowl for March, but I mun leave the dur oppen, if nobbut for my little lass,’ he said to himself, and a smile came upon his weather-beaten face like

a gleam from the setting sun. He made a fine picture, the old man in his fisherman's garb, kneeling by the quaint fireplace attending to his own simple wants. His sou-wester was pushed back from his furrowed forehead and revealed the thick masses of his iron-grey hair. His great shoulders, once so square and proudly carried, were bent with the load of seventy years. When presently he rose to butter his muffin, he walked with a slow, stiff, cautious step. Silas Rimmer was past his best. And what a best that must have been ! what strength and firmness and fearless energy must that noble frame, that brave, unflinching eye have once displayed ! Silas Rimmer had spent his life upon the sea, and, while loving it as a child, had treated it like a servant, making it subservient to his will. Many a tale of his marvellous daring was told of a night by the firesides, not only in Crosshaven, but all along the coast. They said that the lives Captain Silas, as he was familiarly called, had saved were not to be numbered. Not only a brave man this old sea-beaten captain, but a good and a pure and a true, with a heart and soul as pure and as simple as those of a little child. His fighting days were done, and, like his own boat, the *Lucy Wright*, lying high and dry on the sand-hills, he was almost into port. He lived alone in the little whitewashed thatched cottage on the top of the marshes, with no women-folk about him, but though he was alone he was not lonely. He was by nature cheerful and happy ; the sorrow of his youth, which had snatched his three weeks' bride from him, had neither made him a morose nor a melancholy

man. He was loved in Crosshaven with a great love, which was very precious to him, though he said so little about it. He was the children's friend, and the particular friend of one particular little child, for whom, indeed, he was waiting that very afternoon, and for whom the door had been left open in all weathers since ever she had been able to toddle down the slope to the cottage.

It was a quaint old-world corner the kitchen in the home of Captain Silas. The walls were white-washed, and hung with many curious things whereat the children were wont to gaze and marvel. A whale's tusk here, the skeleton of a queer fish there, stuffed birds innumerable, nautical charts, prints of sea-pieces, old fishing-lines, figure-heads supported on roughly-carved brackets: such were the adornments of the place. The floor was laid with brick of a warm red colour, the roof was composed of solid oaken rafters, the furnishings were simple and plain—a deal table, two chairs, an old-fashioned oak settle, and a bed in the corner sufficed for Captain Silas. But in this place he was as happy as a king. He did not fret that he was old and past work, that he must now be an idler at home, and wait with the women, when strong men were required on the raging sea. Perhaps that was the hardest, but he could thank God for many a brave night's work vouchsafed him in the past, and pray for a blessing on those who were young and strong. A beautiful spirit this, and one not easy of cultivation, therefore beyond price. It was a sight to see him butter the

muffin, holding it so carefully in his big brown hand, which bore the mark of many a bruise.

'Half-past four—the little lass's by hoo's toime,' he said, as the old clock rung the half-hour. Just then a shadow fell athwart the doorway, and a shrill, sweet, childish voice fell upon his happy ear.

'Are you in, Captain Silas?'

'Ov coorse, my little lass; coom in, coom in. Thou's late to-neet; I feared, my precious, that I'd need to take tea without somebry.'

'I was sitting with papa, Captain Silas, and helping mamma keep baby. Oh dear, he is so cross!' said the little lady, heaving a prodigious sigh as she perched herself contentedly on the settle, while Captain Silas proceeded to put sugar in the tea-cups.

It was a pretty sight to see the dainty little thing in that rude place, and to see how very much at home she was, and how content and happy. She was a mite of a creature, a little girl of eight, slender—very slender—and pale and fragile, with large, earnest eyes looking out from a sweet mass of golden curls. Not an ordinary child, it was easy to see, but one of those old-fashioned, precocious, world-wise creatures whom we watch and yearn over with a fearful yearning; one of those who probe deep into things from which childhood should be far removed; in a word, a guest, not a dweller upon the earth. Already Daisy Frew, the little daughter of the curate-in-charge at Cross-haven, had turned her face towards her home, and it was not on earth. Captain Silas knew it, and

one other. A little cough shook her as she stretched out her chilled hands to Captain Silas's cheerful fire, and the old man's eye shadowed as he saw the quick bright flush rise to the sweet pale cheek. He saw, too, that she was not warmly clad, but had run down with only a little loose scarf above her pinafore. Had little Daisy, then, no mother? Yes, but we shall see.

'How nice your muffins are, and your tea! but I must have it very weak, please; papa says so,' she said. 'How far can we walk to-night, Captain Silas. Is it wet on the marshes?'

She spoke with the grave precision and correctness of a much older person; indeed, her manner and bearing were touched with a certain dignity and repose not common in a child.

'Nawe, my precious, it's as dry as furze, and we'll walk as far as thou'rt able,' said the Captain gravely. 'Theer's a foine storm comin' up fra th' east, Miss Daisy. It'll be a stiff one, or I'm nawe judge. There'll be nawe more walkin' for thee an' me for a week, fur sure.'

'That's bad; but I'll come down and you'll tell me stories, Captain Silas, won't you? Don't you wish the sunny days were here again, so that we might go out to the sandbanks with Jerry for the cockles?'

'They'll coom, my lass, in their own toime. Jerry's gettin' lazy,' said the Captain, with a sly twinkle in his eye. 'I had my hands as full as a fitch wi' him to-day, I tell thee. I had him at Southport this mornin' for some errands, an' what

does the chap do but lays him down i’ th’ road, panniers an’ all. Theer wur eggs among other things, so thou can imagine, lass, that it wur a pretty pickle.’

‘Oh, what a funny Jerry, Captain Silas!’ cried Daisy, with a kind of sober glee. ‘Where is he to-day? I haven’t seen his dear, funny, rough old face for so long.’

‘He’s on th’ marsh or th’ sand-hills. He goos all over jist loike a human cretur. He knaws his way whoam, my lass, ivvry bit as well as thou,’ said the Captain, with a smile of affection for the absent Jerry. ‘Well nawe, my precious, if thou’s ready, we mun be goin’, or it’ll be dark, an’ t’ parson doesn’t like thee to be out later nor dusk.’

‘I am quite ready, Captain Silas; but mayn’t I help put the tea-things away?’

‘Nawe, nawe, I’ll do that when I coom whoam. It’ll keep me in amusement. Come, then, how shall we goo to-neet? Round by th’ *Lucy Wright* an’ back by th’ “Boot an’ Shoe,” eh?’

‘If you please, Captain Silas.’

So the pair left the cottage together, Captain Silas leaving his door on the latch. There were no thieves in Crosshaven, and if there had, I believe they would not have meddled with a stick or a stone pertaining to Silas Rimmer. The old man and the child went hand in hand down the rough, narrow way, and climbed to the high path which led straight through the marshes to the shore. It was a bleak picture that grey wintry afternoon, the long desolate stretch of the marshes hemmed

in by the low sand-hills, on which the coarse sea-grass, which made a greenness in the summer, had been bleached by the long winter. The tide was far out; in the haze of the gathering night its edge, with a fringe of foam, was just visible playing stealthily about the sandbanks. It was a grey day; there was nothing to relieve the general depression of earth and sea and sky, except the white walls and the red roofs of the Haven, and away to westward the roofs and steeples of South-port.

It was a desolate scene, I say, yet not without its own weird, silent beauty, a certain rugged and deep charm all its own. The deep-set eyes of Captain Silas swept the wide prospect with his usual keen interest. It was never unlovely, never uninteresting to him; perhaps because it was the most familiar scene on the face of the earth to him. The child Daisy looked about her with interest too, and her face clouded a little, as if a sadness, born of the prevailing gloom, had settled down upon her soul.

‘I don’t see Jerry, Captain Silas. Can he be lost?’

‘Lost—Jerry lost!’ laughed the Captain softly. ‘That ’ud be a queer thing, my little lass. Lost—Jerry lost! Not he! Cannot thou see his honest face an’ his long ears thonder beyant the beacon.’

‘Oh yes, I see him now. We shall go round there, Captain Silas, and speak to him. Do you think this is a nice day, Captain Silas? Isn’t it cold and dark?’

‘Ay, it is, my precious, an’ thou’s not gotten enoof on by hauve,’ said the old man, with solicitude. ‘Thou mun promise me, Miss Daisy, to put thy cloak about thee next time thou cooms for thy walk. We cannot spare thee from the Haven.’

‘What do you mean by that, Captain Silas? I am not going away from the Haven, am I?’

‘I hope nawe, my precious,’ said the Captain, and a solitary tear rose in his honest eye.

‘Mamma says I must go to boarding-school soon. I shouldn’t like that, Captain Silas, to be away from papa, and you, and Cicely, and the baby.’

It was noticeable that the child did not name her mother among those whom it would pain her to leave.

‘Thou’s nobbut a mite and a baby thyself yet, Miss Daisy. Whoam’s t’ bit for thee for mony a year yet,’ said the Captain. ‘Here’s t’ *Lucy Wright*. She’s breakin’ up, poor owd lass, like mysen.’

He alluded to the old boat in which he had made many a voyage as he might have alluded to a human being whom he loved. She lay now keel upward on the sandy grass bank above the break-water in which she had been wont to sit at anchor so proudly in the days of long ago, when Captain Silas and the *Lucy Wright* had been the most active members of the Haven community. He laid his big rough hand tenderly on her weather-beaten timbers, and Daisy, moved to a like sympathy, laid her tiny fingers caressingly beside the Captain’s.

‘Many’s the time me an’ th’ owd lass has gotten a good haul an’ weathered a tough storm i’ th’ Channel, Miss Daisy,’ said he, with a tender, regretful pride which was a very touching thing,—‘me an’ th’ *Lucy Wright*. Ay, ay, I mind the neet my own Lucy Wright christened her.’

‘Had you two boats called the *Lucy Wright*, Captain Silas?’

‘Nawe, my lass; but once, many a year before thou wur born, I had a wife called Lucy Wright. Con thou see the big sandbank yonder, Miss Daisy, jist out from Marshside?’

‘Yes, Captain Silas.’

‘She was theer one foggy neet watchin’ for me an’ th’ boat, an’ the tide came in aboot her, an’ the fog closed round her, an’ she couldn’t get th’ way whoam, an’ I nivver seed her noan more,’ said the Captain, in a low, shaking voice, which the child had never heard before.

‘Was she drowned, Captain Silas?’

‘Ay, drowned at our own door, an’ me an’ th’ owd boat not haue a mile off.’

‘Captain Silas,’—the child’s hand timidly and with rare sympathy touched his once more,—‘don’t you think the sea a very cruel thing? It kills people, oh, so many! Do you love it very much?’

‘I cannot tell, my lass, but I think I mun, for I never feel so gradely at whoam anywheer else. But that wur a cruel thing. It wur a dark day for me that, my precious. I cannot think on it yet without a quaking. But it wur th’ Lord’s will,

for sure, an' th' toime's near when I'll see my Lucy Wright; it cannot be long noo.'

'Are you going away from the Haven soon, Captain Silas?'

The child's voice was wistful, her earnest eyes had a touch of pain as they dwelt upon the rugged face of her dear old friend.

'Some day, my lass, when t' Lord's time cooms, I mun goo. I'm breakin' up loike t' owd lass, an' mun get into port.'

'Don't go till I go, Captain Silas,' said the child simply, and without thought that there might be anything prophetic in her words. They startled the Captain, and reminded him that they were lingering too long in the chill night air.

'We mun goo, my precious. T' parson 'ud take my head off for keepin' thee stonin' here. Coom, let's seek after that brute ov a Jerry.'

So saying, he clasped the hand of his little companion closely in his spacious palm, and they took their way briskly together along the marsh, keeping close by the edge of the breakwater, where the fishing-boats drifted lazily, waiting for the incoming tide. They chatted pleasantly as they went, the child questioning mostly, he answering in good faith, as anxious to give information as she was to seek it. It would be hard to say which found these evening strolls pleasantest; they were real joys in the life of both the old man and the little child. The Haven folks had grown accustomed to seeing the two solitary figures wandering about the marshes and the shore, in the clear evening

light, and would smile to each other at 't' Captain an' his little lass.' By and by they came up with Jerry, the Captain's donkey, who carried the load of cockles from the sandbanks to the village, and was as great a favourite in the Haven as his master. He was very ugly, painfully homely even for a donkey, but he was fat and good-natured and well cared for, and could afford to be perfectly indifferent to his personal appearance. His broad face, however, had a singular intelligence upon it, and when he pricked up his ears he had quite a knowing look, which was very comical. His shaggy coat was generally matted with the sand, and his sides were quite bare with the cockle sacks rubbing against them. But he was a good, useful donkey, and as the Captain was very fond of him, it behoved Daisy to be fond of him likewise.

When they went on again, after patting and talking to Jerry, he followed contentedly up behind, evidently of opinion that it was time for him to be home also.

Cicely Sutton, the landlady of the 'Boot and Shoe,' stepping out after tea for a look at the sky, saw the trio coming leisurely across from the sandhills to the village, and a smile grew broader on her broad, comfortable face. There seemed always a smile more or less about Cicely's mouth and lurking in her clear, kind grey eye; you could not imagine her cross or out of sorts. She had a large, comfortable person too, and her every movement was suggestive of good nature and goodwill. When

you looked at Cicely Sutton you did not at all wonder at the popularity of the 'Boot and Shoe.' It was a quaint little hostelry, in which the wayfarer could throw himself on the old oak settle by the wide fireplace, and drink Cicely's famous tea in real, solid comfort. There was no taproom, nor even a bar in the 'Boot and Shoe;' it was a homely hostelry of the old-world type, in which one could feel welcome and heartily at home. It being about tea-time in the village, there was no one on the settle but Sutton himself, enjoying his evening pipe after his work was done. The inn belonged to Cicely now, and her husband took nothing to do with the management. He had his own work to attend to, his occupation being that of a carrier, and he would sometimes say, in his slow, dry way that he was only a lodger at the 'Boot and Shoe.' But though he had not his wife's active, bustling, cheerful temper, he could hold his own, and on the whole they were a happy, well-matched pair. They were childless, a grief to Cicely, whose heart was a big motherly one, as every child in the Haven knew.

'Jist come here, Sutton, or look out by the window,' said Cicely, putting her head round the kitchen door.

'What is't, owd lass?' asked Sutton lazily.

'Oh, th' Cap'n an' his little lass an' Jerry, ov coorse. It's a sight to see the two o' them—it is indeed. They'll be coomin' in, loikely. I mun git a slice o' cake for Miss Daisy.'

So saying, Cicely bustled into the kitchen, and

took a large tempting-looking spiced loaf from the wall cupboard.

‘Theer’s a storm brewin’, Sutton. I see by the seafowls screaming all over the marshes,’ she said. ‘I wish it ’ud coom an’ be done wi’ it. I say, I wonder how th’ parson’s wife ’ll loike the thowt o’ th’ Rectory being let to strangers.’

‘She’ll ha’ to loike it. T’ Rectory ain’t hers, lass,’ was Sutton’s comment, as he indolently watched the blue smoke from his pipe curling up to the oaken rafters. ‘She won’t loike it. She’ll be in a ragin’ passion.’

‘Well, it does seem a mean thing for th’ rector to do; but for sure it’ll be his wife’s doin’,’ said Cicely. ‘Th’ parson himsel’ mun feel a bit sore at th’ way he’s passed ower. Theer wur nowt to hinder them fra’ livin’ at th’ Rectory when the rector’s away. Nobbut Mrs. Frew cannot keep her own little corner tidy, so how could she do wi’ sich a house as th’ Rectory?’

‘How you women peck at each other!’ said Sutton, with his slow, dry smile. ‘I could bet, noo, th’ parson’s wife con keep house as well as thou con.’

‘I jist wish thou had a trial o’ her, my mon,’ said Cicely quietly. ‘Theer ’ud be squally weather, I doubt, in th’ “Boot an’ Shoe.” Well, if they han’t gone away t’other way,’ she added, going out to the door again. ‘It’s time th’ little lass wur whoam out o’ the cowl. I dursay we’ll ha’ the Cap’n as he comes back.’

She surmised rightly. Having seen the little companion of his walk to the door of her father’s

house, the Captain came briskly down the lane, and entered Cicely's kitchen.

'Good evenin' both. A cowl raw neet this,' he said briskly.

Sutton nodded, and made room on the settle, while Cicely went for a glass of ale.

'I watched tho an' th' little lass coomin' by the sand-hills, an' ran to cut a bit o' cake fur her, but thou's gin me th' slip. How's th' world usin tho, Cap'n Silas?'

'As well's ever. Hoo's tho gettin' on, Cicely?'

'Th' same owd way, Cap'n, an' Sutton's th' same owd man. Jist see him lounging there as if he'd broken his back wi' his hard work. Gie me men-folk for knowin' hoo to be good to thursel's.'

Sutton grunted, and winked to the Captain in his slow way, as much as to say, 'Listen to her now.'

'I've news for tho, Cap'n; th' Rectory's let to some folks fra Southport, an' they'll be here in no time. The servants are to coom up to-morrow.'

'Ay, ay, 'at'll be some'at for Haven folks to sharpen their tongues wi'.'

'Ay is it, Cap'n. Cicely's been sharpenin' hers on it sin' ever she got th' bit o' news fra Joss o' Peter Wright's up at th' mill. He wur bringin' flour here, an' he brings th' news, reet or wrang. Cicely's swallowed it, as women-folk do wi' their eyes shut.'

'You shut thy mouth, Sutton, an' let me get word o' th' Cap'n. Hast seen th' new doctor, Cap'n Silas?'

'Ay, twice, ridin' on th' road. A manly, well-loike chap, Cicely.'

'Ay is he. A tall, strappin', handsome chap, Cap'n Silas. If his inside be as fair as his outside, he'll cut out th' owd man. What do tho' think but that he comes fra Waveney, where my sister Mary Anne, as married Bolsover th' attorney, lives.'

'There'll be a letter followin' up from Mary Anne wi' a' th' latest news about th' chap—who he's cworted an' who he hasn't. It wur a pity, wurn't it, Cap'n, 'at he knawed any o' Cicely's folk,' said Sutton, with a grin.

'Hear him, Cap'n Silas,' cried Cicely, with a laugh. 'As if men-folk didn't like a bit o' talk as well's a woman. But they doan't think. If they'd nobbut listen to thirsens 'at meets here some-toimes; sich a din an' clatter, an' turnin' their neighbours inside out. There's nowt wrang wi' 'at, I suppose, though it's a deadly sin for a woman to turn ower a bit o' news in a kindly spirit.'

'Hear, hear, Cicely! Thou's gotten th' right way,' said the Captain, clapping his hand on the table. 'Theer's noan harm in a bit kindly gossip. If we live among folk it's natur' for us to talk o' them. There's nothing wrang wi' 'at. It's the spiteful wicked talk which mak's t' worst o' folk's failin's that's wrang; at least t'at's my way o' thinkin'.'

'An' mine,' nodded Cicely. 'I say, Cap'n, the little lass is gettin' too owd and world-wise like. I'm afeard sometimes when I look at her. There's a some'at in her big eyes 'at goes to mi heart like, and mak's me like to cry. Is hoo weel, think tho?'

A shadow fell across the cheerful sunshine on the face of Captain Silas.

'It goos to mi heart, Cicely, to hear thee say that, tho' I see it mysen, I see it mysen.'

'She an't keered for, that's how it goos,' said Sutton. 'Th' parson's wife's no moore use than t'at table, nor so much. She wur always a useless, silly thing all her days. I've knawn her since she was so high.'

'She isn't like th' parson, bless un !' said Cicely, and a tear stood in her eye. And somehow it was as if a discord had jarred upon their cheerful talk, and very soon Captain Silas rose and said he would have to go and get Jerry housed for the night. Cicely followed him to the door.

'If anything took th' little lass, Cap'n Silas, th' parson 'ud never howd up his head again.'

'Nor any o' us, Cicely. Hoo's our little lass as well as his'n.'

'Ay, that hoo is. I guess it 'ud be no use askin' the Lord to spare her. Hoo's gotten His mark on her face. Hoo wur in here yesterday, an' when hoo wur gone, I just said to Sutton, "Miss Daisy an't long for this world."'

The Captain slowly shook his head and walked away down the street. He paused once or twice, and looked upon the ground as if absorbed in deep thought. By the time he reached the cottage Jerry was waiting at the gate. And just then the first drops of the storm came pattering down, and the wind rose with a sudden gusty shriek, and in half an hour the fury of a winter's storm had burst upon the Haven.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CURATE IN CHARGE.

‘A little rift within the lute.’

THE fire had gone out in the study. The curate, sitting at his table with writing materials before him, glanced at the dead embers and shivered as he tried once again to apply himself to his task. It *was* a task that wintry afternoon; of late Gilbert Frew had found less joy than of yore in his chosen work. Outward circumstances were telling upon the man; his heart was growing chilled by the frosts of life. The curate in charge at Crosshaven had need of an exceptional faith; the demands upon it were serious and many. The place in which he sat, called by courtesy the study, was a cheerless place enough. The furniture was poor and plain, and, being ill-kept and even dirty, it had a meagre, miserable look. The square of carpet in the middle of the floor was worn quite threadbare, and looked dusty, besides being littered with scraps of paper, ends of thread, and crumbs. The atmosphere of the room was close and heavy, and smelt of

cobwebs and dust and lack of air. Certainly the curate's surroundings were not calculated to infuse much warmth into his soul. His attire corresponded with the general shabbiness, but one glance at Gilbert Frew was sufficient to assure one that he was a gentleman. There was a certain dignity and even grace in the tall, spare, slightly-rounded figure, and the face was wholly winning. If any fault could be found with that finely-moulded countenance, it was that it lacked decision and manliness. The deep grey eyes were gentle and sad, the mouth sweet and mobile like a woman's. It was a sad face. There dwelt upon it an expression of patience, of saintly sweetness not natural to any human face. Such a look is bought by hard experience, and is worn, as a rule, at serious cost. It is a look more common on the faces of women than of men in this world.

Darkness had stolen upon him while he lingered idly at his desk, with the open Bible before him, and his pen in his hand. He had not even chosen a text, and it was Friday evening. Gilbert Frew could only now write his sermons under the strain of haste and dire necessity. It was a common thing for him to sit far into the Sabbath morning preparing his work for the day. They said in Crosshaven that for a time back Mr. Frew had been more eloquent than in the first years of his ministrations. They did not know that the words which were with such power among them were the result of pressure upon heart and head which could not possibly go on. Such a state of things

showed that there must be care of no ordinary kind sapping the springs of hope and energy in the curate's being. We may be permitted a glimpse into his home. Perhaps we may find there the primary cause. His reverie, if indeed it was a reverie, was interrupted presently by a low, light tap at the door. It was the child Daisy, returned from her evening walk with Captain Silas.

‘May I come in, dear papa?’

A smile, very rare and very beautiful, immediately dawned upon the curate's face.

‘Come in, my darling, to be sure,’ he answered, and there was a perceptible tone of relief in his voice.

Instantly the door was gently opened, carefully closed again, and the child stole lightly across the floor and climbed upon her father's knee. She laid her arms about his neck, her cheek to his, and so they sat in silence for a time. It was easy to see the love which was between them, a love far surpassing the ordinary affection between parent and child. These two were sufficient one to the other.

‘Tea is ready, papa. I have been at Captain Silas's, and had mine with him, out of the funny little teapot with the fish carved on it. Then we walked along the marsh to see Jerry. Oh, papa, such a funny, naughty Jerry he was to-day. He tumbled all Captain Silas's errands on the road and broke all the eggs, every one.’

‘Which shows that Jerry has a dignity of his own, and objects to being made Jack of all trades.’

I daresay he thinks his legitimate business is to carry the cockle baskets,' answered the curate, with his quiet smile.

'How cold it is out to-day, papa! Captain Silas says there is a storm coming up.'

'Were you cold out of doors, Daisy?'

'A little, papa.'

'And are you tired with your walk?'

There was keen and affectionate solicitude in these questions which indicated an anxious heart.

'A little, papa, but not more than usual. I think *you* are very tired, dear papa, writing your sermon. Is it quite finished?'

'Not even begun, my darling.'

'Oh, you naughty, lazy papa. I think you should not have any tea for being so lazy.'

'That would be a punishment. Come, then, and see what mamma says to it. What stories did the Captain tell you to-day?'

'Oh, a sad story, papa, about Lucy Wright, his wife. She was drowned, papa, in the fog on the sandbank watching for Captain Silas and the *Lucy Wright*. Wasn't that a bad thing, papa?'

The child's large, earnest eyes were full of pain as she spoke. The thing had laid hold of her heart; she would never forget it. It was her nature to brood and ponder such things in her soul, a strange and undesirable habit for a child.

'I have heard the story, Daisy. It was before I came to the Haven.'

'Yes, it was long ago; but Captain Silas does not forget. It makes him sad yet. He cried

when he told me to-day, standing by the old boat.'

'Did he, dear? No doubt it was a great sorrow to him,' said the curate dreamily, and taking the child's hand in his he crossed the little hall, and entered the sitting-room, where tea was laid, and the children clamouring noisily round the table. The study, with all its discomfort, was preferable to the common sitting-room at Woodbine Cottage.

'Do come away, Mr. Frew,' said a fretful, peevish voice the moment he entered. 'How do you suppose it possible for me to attend to this tribe with baby on my knee?'

'Could Martha not take baby while we have tea, dear?' asked the curate gently.

'Martha, indeed! She engaged to have nothing to do with the children, and she sticks to the letter of her engagement. Those who can't afford to keep a nurse-girl must just be tormented with children at all times, and they *are* a torment. Willie Frew, if you don't stop that kicking the chair legs I'll box your ears and send you to the nursery.'

The culprit, a round-faced, chubby boy of five, grinned, but was immediately subdued by one glance from his father's eyes. The little Frews obeyed their father's every look, though he was always gentle with them; I fear they had a very scanty measure of respect for their mother. I do not know that I shall try to describe Henrietta Frew. It would not be a pleasant task. She had been a pretty, silly, idle girl, brought up with her uncle,

the rector of Crosshaven, who indulged every whim to which she gave expression. Thus she had had a poor preparation for the present life. When Gilbert Frew, a pale, handsome, intellectual student from Oxford, came as curate to Crosshaven, it was perhaps natural that Henrietta Lake should be interested in him. Both had drifted into matrimony without much forethought or regard for the future, and the rector had not seen fit to withhold his consent, though he warned his niece that she was not making a change for the better. Henrietta, however, thought all promised fair: her uncle was an elderly man, possessed of ample means; what more natural than that the good living should very soon fall to Gilbert Frew? The curate himself took no thought for the future, and most certainly never gave a moment's consideration to the chances depending on the retirement or death of Mr. Ridgeway. He was a student and a scholar, a man given to dreaming and thinking; not a practical man by any means, not one certainly who should have married on the income of a curate. What sympathy or affinity there could be between him and Henrietta Lake I do not pretend to be able to tell. Now, after a lapse of eleven dreary years, it might well be a matter of conjecture how two beings so utterly unsuited to each other should ever have bound themselves together in marriage. Twelve months after his niece left him, the rector himself married a young and handsome woman, and thus inflicted a grievous disappointment on Mrs. Frew. She had so long

regarded the Rectory as her home, and though, to please her husband, who insisted on a separate establishment, she had taken up her abode at Woodbine Cottage, she only regarded the arrangement as temporary, and kept the Rectory in view. But her uncle's marriage made a great change, and for ever closed the doors of the Rectory against her. Mrs. Ridgeway was a haughty young woman, who treated the curate and his wife with patronizing contempt. If there was one sentiment stronger than another in the breast of Henrietta Frew, it was aversion to her uncle's wife. Happily Mrs. Ridgeway did not long remain in Crosshaven to be a daily thorn in the side of the curate's wife. She declared it impossible to live in such a dull place, and carried her elderly husband off to a fashionable German resort, where they practically made their home. Mr. Ridgeway paid occasional visits to his parish, but Gilbert Frew was left curate in charge, for which he was paid a hundred and sixty pounds per annum. The rector would willingly have made it two hundred, but his wife prevented him. The Rectory was shut up, the beautiful old rooms, with their fine furnishings, never saw the light of day. This state of matters did not give entire satisfaction in Crosshaven, but the Rector was perfectly indifferent to that. He had always been a pompous and rather indolent man, and now in his old age he had given himself up wholly to the world. Gilbert Frew's post was no sinecure, yet he strove conscientiously to fulfil his many duties, though often with a tired and

THE CURATE IN CHARGE.

anxious heart. There was nothing to give him courage at home. When a man has a happy fire-side he is doubly strong to fight the world's battle. There is no armour more serviceable in the field of life than that buckled on by the hands of wife and children who love and are beloved. Gilbert Frew had striven to do his duty by his wife ; she was still dear to him, but it must be told that it was as the mother of his children rather than as his wife. A sad thing indeed, but not without parallel in everyday life. The secret of wedded happiness is a mysterious and beautiful thing which requires very delicate handling. Henrietta Frew, being disappointed in her lot in life, had degraded herself into a slattern and a shrew. Her husband was compassionated in Crosshaven as much as he was beloved. Very few indeed had a good word to say for the curate's wife, yet she needed pity perhaps more than he. For he had his own deep joys peculiar to a refined and sensitive nature, and his people loved him with a great love. He could not go out of doors without receiving evidence of it, and it was very precious to him. But he was a careworn, anxious, often a sad-hearted man. He saw his five children growing up around him, every day increasing their wants, which he had not the wherewithal to meet. Mrs. Frew was not a manager. The stipend was not so meagrely small but that it might have afforded quiet comfort, and left a surplus for future need.

What was to become of those young creatures was a question which often darkened the horizon of the curate's thought. As for his wife, she drifted with

the tide, spent the money recklessly as it came in, and, when it was all gone, grumbled over dinner without meat and bread without butter till quarter day brought her luxury again. One thing the curate sternly set his face against, the incurring of debt even for household necessities. What could not be paid for must be dispensed with, was his rule, one which as yet his wife had not ventured to break. A disappointed, frivolous, fretful woman, then, was the curate's wife, asking nor craving no higher delight than to forget the sordid cares of life in the pages of the last novel from the circulating library at Southport.

Mr. Frew took the child from his wife's arms and sat down by the table, Daisy stealing to the chair at his side. The children were five in number, all boys but Daisy, who was her father's pet. He tried to feel equally towards all his children, but he could not help the peculiar and clinging affection going out to the little girl. Mrs. Frew was jealous of her husband's affection for the child, and, strange as it may seem, was less indulgent to her than to any of the others. Daisy feared her mother; her sensitive nature shrank from the outbursts of temper and the quick, harsh words which fell so readily from her mother's lips. These things shadowed the child's life, and were real and great sorrows to her, over which she brooded in silence.

'Where were you, Daisy Frew, that you did not come help Martha to get tea?' asked Mrs. Frew, turning her eyes sharply on the child's face. It was a peculiarity of the curate's wife to call her

children their full name when she addressed them.

‘I was on the marshes, mamma, with Captain Silas,’ Daisy answered meekly.

‘Captain Silas! always Captain Silas. This must be put a stop to. Remember in future, Daisy Frew, that I don’t choose that you should walk in the marshes with a common, ignorant old fisherman. It cannot be good for the child, Mr. Frew, to associate so much with that old man.’

‘She will get no harm, but only good from Captain Silas, Henrietta,’ said the curate, with a slight smile. He knew well that the heart of the old man was as pure and simple as that of his own little child.

‘Oh, of course!’ snapped Mrs. Frew. ‘It would be impossible for you to agree with me or to support my authority before the children. But if you go on the marshes again with Captain Silas, Daisy Frew, I shall whip you—remember that.’

Mrs. Frew was out of sorts, in plain words, in a bad temper. Funds were low at Woodbine Cottage, and a whisper that the Rectory was let had reached her ears. The curate’s face flushed, but he did not say to his wife that Daisy should not be whipped should she walk again with Captain Silas. But upon that he was determined. The child’s lip quivered as she bent to her teacup, but she spoke not a word.

‘Have you heard, Mr. Frew, that the Rectory is let?’ Mrs. Frew asked, more placidly, as she sipped her own tea.

‘Yes, I heard it some days ago.’

‘And did not think it worth your while to tell me,’ snapped Mrs. Frew. ‘I had it from Martha when she came in to set the tea. Would it not be too much to ask whether you know anything about the tenants?’

‘Doctor Radcliffe told me, Henrietta. A Mr. Barham and his wife from near Ainsborough. Quite young people. He met with a serious accident in the hunting-field. I believe his back was injured. They have been at Southport for some weeks, but Mr. Barham has tired of it.’

‘Barham,’ said Mrs. Frew meditatively. ‘Is he Barham of Scaris Dene, do you know?’

‘That is the name of his place, I believe,’ said the curate absently, as he tried to extricate the baby’s fist from his tea. He handled the child awkwardly, and could not enjoy his meals and nurse him at the same time. Nevertheless Mrs. Frew invariably placed the child on his knee when they were at table.

‘That will make a fine stir in the Haven. They will pay a pretty sum for the house; Caroline Ridgeway would see to that,’ said Mrs. Frew bitterly. ‘There is some one coming in at the garden gate—a gentleman; do you know him, Mr. Frew?’

‘Oh, that’s the new doctor, mamma,’ said Willie, with his mouth full. ‘I’ve seen him often.’

‘Oh, indeed! What does he want here, I wonder.’

‘He will wish to return my call, probably,’ said the curate. ‘Can I bring him in here, Henrietta, and offer him a cup of tea?’

‘No, you can’t. Just look at the mess on the table! We can’t afford to offer anybody a meal. It is as much as we can do to fill our own mouths,’ said Mrs. Frew, more forcibly than elegantly. ‘Sit still, Mr. Frew; Martha will show him into the study, I daresay, and tell you.’

But Martha, instead of taking the caller to the unoccupied room, brought him to the sitting-room door, and announced him by name, Doctor Holgate. Mrs. Frew rose, not at all confused, and received him with a gracious smile. He was a young and handsome man. Mrs. Frew suddenly remembered that she had once been attractive. The instincts of the vain coquette were still alive within her. The children stared open-mouthed, the curate rose, with the baby on his arm, looking slightly confused.

He was a gentleman, and he keenly felt the awkwardness of his position, only for a moment however. As he looked into the dark eyes of the stranger, he felt kindly toward him, a sweet smile touched his lips, and he frankly held out his hand.

‘How are you, Doctor Holgate? I am pleased to see you. This is my wife. Excuse lack of ceremony, and join us at tea.’

‘Yes, do, Doctor Holgate,’ said Mrs. Frew. ‘Now, you children, get away, every one of you, to the nursery, and be quiet there. Daisy, tell Martha to bring some hot water, and then take baby and keep him quiet in the nursery.’

Holgate sat down. The table was not inviting, strewn with the children’s scraps and crumbs, and adorned with dirty cups. Then Mrs. Frew, in her

soiled and even ragged gown, with her hair untidily caught up with pins at the back, did not make an attractive hostess. But there was something about the curate which drew Holgate to him; his face had a history, his eyes carried in their depths a world of patient endurance.

‘I was sorry I missed your call, Mr. Frew,’ Holgate said sincerely. ‘And I ought to have returned it earlier.’

‘Oh, not at all. We do not stand on ceremony in the Haven,’ said the curate, with his sunny smile. ‘And how are you going to take to us? Kindly, I hope. We are prepared to be very fond of you. I have heard good reports of you already in the Haven. Doctor Radcliffe will require to look to his laurels, eh?’

‘Doctor Radcliffe is behind the age, and he never was much of a favourite,’ said Mrs. Frew. ‘I fear the advantage will be all on our side. There is not much in the Haven to recommend it to you. It is a mean, vulgar, horrid little place.’

‘I am sorry to hear that, Mrs. Frew. I assure you I had formed quite a different opinion of it.’

‘Which you’ll soon change,’ said Mrs. Frew, with a nod. ‘Of course Mr. Frew will contradict me; he always does. But I know Crosshaven well. I’ve lived in it since I was six. My uncle is the rector.’

‘Indeed? He does not reside here, I understand.’

‘No.’

The monosyllable was jerked from Mrs. Frew’s lips with extraordinary vehemence. The curate

looked nervous. He did not wish his wife to ventilate her pet grievance before a stranger. He tried to change the subject by asking Holgate a question concerning his former home, but directly it was answered Mrs. Frew began again.

‘You’ll be having a new and a paying patient presently. The Rectory is let furnished,—a shameful thing if ever there was one; but it’s Mrs. Ridgeway’s doing. My uncle would never do such a thing.’

‘I understand that the tenants come to the Rectory to-morrow.’

‘Oh, indeed? Do you know them, Doctor Holgate?’

‘Not at all; I am ignorant even of their name, Mrs. Frew.’

‘Oh, I know their name; Barham, from Scaris Dene, near Ainsborough.’

Holgate visibly started. Mrs. Frew made a mental note of it.

‘By the bye, were you not located near Ainsborough, Doctor Holgate?’ asked the curate.

‘Yes, at Waveney, seven miles east of Ainsborough. I have heard the name of Barham,’ answered Holgate. ‘It is a curious coincidence that they should come here. I knew of the sad accident which befel Mr. Barham.’

‘Ay, a young man in the prime of life, and a beautiful young wife, I am told. It is very sad,’ said the curate. ‘Have you half an hour’s leisure, doctor? Would you care to take a stroll with me across the marshes?’

‘I shall be most happy.’

‘I’m sure you needn’t be so inhospitable, Mr. Frew, turning Doctor Holgate out like that!’ said Mrs. Frew sharply. ‘Men are so selfish, Doctor Holgate. Mr. Frew forgets that it might be a little change for me to talk to you. I am never out of doors. Life is changed for me since the dear old Rectory days, when my uncle and I were all in all to each other.’

Holgate saw the curate wince and slightly turn his head away. He looked from husband to wife, noting unconsciously the striking contrast between them. He knew now what had placed these deep lines on the curate’s brow, what had given to his face that patient look which had in it a touch of the sublime.





CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS.

‘This to me is life,
That if life be a burden, I will join
To make it but the burden of a song.’

BAILEY.



‘HERE shall we go?’ asked the curate when they stepped out of doors. ‘The sky has overcast; I am afraid it will rain presently.’

‘It will not harm us,’ said Holgate. ‘I have not had time yet to go down by the shore.’

‘Come, then.’

The curate opened the garden gate, and allowed Holgate to pass out first.

Woodbine Cottage, a small but picturesque brick building, stood on a slight eminence above the church, and commanded the village and a fine sea view. It had been built by Mr. Ridgeway as a residence for the curate. The church was a large handsome structure recently restored, but the Rectory was quite a picture, a lovely rambling old house, hung with ivy, embowered among trees. Its wide garden stretched across to the road, but

it had a neglected appearance, having been long uncared for. A man, however, was working in it as the two gentlemen passed. The curate paused, and, leaning over the low wall, called him by name, and asked for his wife and family.

‘That seems a fine old house. Is the rector out of health that he lives abroad?’ asked Holgate when they went on again.

‘No; but his wife does not like the Haven,’ returned the curate, with slightly shadowing eyes. ‘It is a pity. His action has weaned him away from the people, and they loved him once.’

‘And have you the entire work of the parish, Mr. Frew?’

‘I have.’

‘Is there not an abuse there?’ asked Holgate. ‘I presume the absentee will be the recipient of the larger portion of the income?’

The curate smiled.

‘My stipend is a hundred and sixty pounds per annum, Doctor Holgate.’

Holgate looked curiously into the curate’s fine face. Its expression was perfectly serene; there was not even a trace of bitterness in his eye.

‘You seem perfectly satisfied. I wonder that you stay here,’ he said involuntarily.

‘It is not easy, in these days of overcrowding in the professions, to make an advantageous change,’ said the curate. ‘Besides, I love the place and the people. I believe I have a corner in every heart in the parish.’

‘No doubt; but your children are growing up

about you. How many did I see in your dining-room?' asked Holgate.

'I have five,' returned the curate, and the sunshine on his face became obscured by a passing shadow. The surgeon had touched a sore point. 'I confess I have many an anxious thought concerning them, and yet why should I. My times and theirs are in my Father's hand.'

Holgate was surprised. He had never heard any one speak in such a strain. The expression on the curate's face as he uttered these words was even more expressive. It betrayed a full and confident trust in an unseen love which touched Holgate. He did not understand it. Hitherto religion had not occupied his thoughts, nor had it had a place in the home where he had been reared. As yet, perhaps, he had not felt the need of it. Yet this man spoke as if his faith were one of the most precious of his possessions. The curate had started a new vein of thought in the surgeon's mind, which might yet be touched to fine issues.

'So you have been favourably impressed with Crosshaven?' said the curate, as they entered upon the village. 'I hope a closer acquaintance with it will strengthen these pleasant impressions. They are a simple, kindly, honest people, who in the main do their duty by God and man.'

'I expect to be very happy and comfortable,' returned the surgeon, then he paused a moment and looked up the wide, straggling street. 'Do you know, it is very picturesque. The old inn is a picture in itself. It is a quaint, old-fashioned place.'

‘Yes, it is. Have you been inside? The interior is very quaint. Well I daresay you will see it often enough yet. Cicely Sutton is a large-hearted, hospitable soul.’

‘So I have heard. I lodged with her relatives in Waveney, Mr. Frew.’

‘With Mrs. Bolsover? You must tell Cicely that. You should hear her giving an opinion on Bolsover, as she calls her late brother-in-law. She is an original soul,’ said the curate, with a quiet smile of amusement. ‘We need not go up just now, however; we had better stroll round by Silas Rimmer’s to the breakwater. That was a drop of rain, I think, but it will not come heavily all at once.’

‘I should think you have not much congenial society here, Mr. Frew,’ said Holgate, as they turned their faces towards the sea.

‘What do you mean by congenial society?’

‘Well, I mean there cannot be many cultured or intellectual people in a place like this.’

‘There is not much book-learning, if you mean that, but there is plenty of intellect and of that innate culture which is independent of outward things. Old Silas Rimmer, for instance, who lives in the cottage we have just passed, is a gentleman if ever there was one. Ay, many a lesson have I learned from Captain Silas.’

‘I don’t understand you, Mr. Frew. The man is a fisherman, I believe. How could you learn anything from a common, ignorant old man?’

‘I don’t like to hear you utter these cant phrases.’

A man may be a fisherman, and yet neither common nor ignorant. Captain Silas is certainly neither. He can read nature as we read an open book, and, what is infinitely more important, he finds the Creator in every phase of it. I owe much to that good old man. He has given me heart many a time when I have seen things darkly, when my faith has been loosing its hold.'

'Mr. Frew, do you believe that we are really in the hands of a higher power, that all we do is of importance to Him, that He orders our lives for us?' asked Holgate, the question falling involuntarily from his lips.

'Do you doubt it?'

'I have never thought of it. I have had no time to study these things.'

The curate turned his deep eyes full on his companion's face. Holgate met that look for an instant, and then turned his head away. He felt humbled when he saw the compassion in the curate's eyes. The unworthiness of his own aims was presented to him for the first time. Self, self-advancement, was the centre as yet of all his thoughts. He saw at that moment the meanness of his pursuit. It was a new and not a pleasant sensation. His colour rose, he bit his lip, and bent his eyes upon the ground. The curate saw these things, but took no notice of them.

'The sea is wild to-night. Look at the breakers yonder. They are furious.'

He stood still on the bank, and pointed across the marshes. The tide had come in with rapidity,

and was now washing the marshes. It was an angry grey sea, the waves were high and broke with surging spray on the desolate shore. The rain-mist had lowered on the opposite coast, hiding it entirely from view; even Southport, a little to their left, was obscured. The rain was beginning to fall in a steady shower.

‘It is a pleasant thought that He holds you tossing expanse in the hollow of His hand,’ said the curate dreamily. ‘To liken life to a sea is a common simile, but one of great beauty and fitness. Were it not for the knowledge that we are in His care, we could not breast its storms, and they are many.’

He spoke more to himself than to his companion, his eye wore an absent expression, as if his thoughts had been elsewhere. Holgate felt uncomfortable, but he knew that he was drawn to Gilbert Frew, that his heart went out to him in no ordinary way, a new experience also for him.

‘Come, we must go on. We shall be drenched presently,’ said the curate, with a swift, sudden smile. ‘Well, are we to be friends?’

‘If you wish it.’

‘I do wish it. I like you. Your face wins one. May God bless you, and make you a blessing to us all.’

They shook hands there, standing in the gathering darkness, with the raindrops beating fiercely upon them. So they sealed their friendship, which was to stand firm through many a strange vicissitude, and which was to be a blessing unspeakable to Denis Holgate. They knew little of each other,

and, though to outward seeming there was little in common between them, the heart of the one had gone out to the other with that mysterious and subtle power which is not a product of time, but of sympathy and affinity in human nature.

‘Tell me something of yourself,’ said the curate presently, as they began quickly to retrace their steps. ‘You are not a Lancashire man?’

‘No ; I was born in London,’ Holgate answered, and in spite of himself a restraint crept into his voice and manner.

‘You studied there?’

‘Yes ; and my home is there too.’

‘It is a great city ; its magnitude overwhelms one’s thought,’ said the curate. ‘If I have ever wished for a change, it has been for a city charge. I could have thrown my heart very warmly into the work there.’

‘There are many good livings in London, I believe,’ said Holgate absently.

‘I should prefer an East End charge. My heart often goes out in pity towards that gigantic mission field. I have always been able to make more friends among the poor than among the rich.’

‘I have no interest in the poor.’

Holgate spoke curtly, and his expression changed. The curate looked at him for a second in mild surprise, but made no comment on his words.

‘I think poverty is, in nine cases out of ten, the individual’s own fault. Any man, by keeping an aim in view and steadily working for it, can attain to a position in the world,’ continued Holgate.

‘I do not agree with you,’ said the curate quietly. ‘We cannot always control the circumstances of life, nor can we avoid its vicissitudes. Many a brave and noble soul has succumbed in the struggle. A wholly selfish man, of course, succeeds where a more scrupulous man will fail.’

Holgate was silent. Perhaps he felt rebuked. Once more a vision of the old life was before him. It was the face of Rhoda that stood out most vividly. Had he not been very selfish where she was concerned?

‘Mr. Frew, may I ask you a question? Supposing a man has been hampered by his early associations, is he not justified in casting them off?’

‘I do not quite understand you. If by associations you mean obligations, certainly not,’ said the curate, and his eye dwelt keenly on his companion’s face. He fancied the surgeon was speaking of himself. ‘If you refer to evil companions or habits, of course it is a different thing. But I have known men who, aided by the unselfish devotion of parents, have risen to positions of eminence, but whose souls, instead of being blessed by the largeness of life, have become stunted and miserable things, and who have looked with contempt upon those to whom they owed their success. The world may call these successful men, but a curse dwells upon them, because they have broken one of the commandments.’

‘You speak strongly, Mr. Frew.’

‘I feel strongly. It is a common sin, and is not much reprobated. Even in the Haven we have

had instances of old people becoming chargeable to the parish, because their own children had become careless of their sacred obligations. I sometimes think that filial ingratitude is a product of the nineteenth century.'

The curate's words were powerful, they sank into the heart of Denis Holgate. He had never met one who expressed himself so fearlessly, and he had not a word to say. For a moment he felt tempted to lay his case before his new friend, but, reflecting that the shortness of their acquaintance scarcely justified such a confidence, he refrained. Sometimes Holgate stilled an accusing conscience by reflecting that he was only obeying a parental behest. Yet he was not at ease. There was a nobleness in him which revolted against the severance of that sacred bond of kinship. He felt that in accepting his mother's mistaken charge he had lowered his own manhood. Holgate was awaking gradually to the knowledge of a higher life than that bounded by a merely selfish aim. A perpetual struggle seemed to be going on in his mind.

'I hope we shall see much of each other,' said the curate, as they approached the home of Captain Silas. 'Perhaps we may be of use to each other; the true use of friendship.'

'Mr. Frew, you are a good man,' said the surgeon, with a boyish simplicity and earnestness which became him well.

'Nay, only a struggling soul who often finds the path of life too hard. I have not been without

care. Even now it sits darkly on my heart. Were I what you say, a truly good man, I should be able to trust to the uttermost. There are times, no doubt, when one can mount the very hill of God, but too often we are found faltering along the dark valleys. I do try imperfectly to do my duty; and the Lord is very tender. He will not break the bruised reed.'

It was impossible not to be moved by the pathos of the curate's words. Holgate looked at him, and saw that his face was turned towards the raging sea with an expression of peace and of joy. A feeling of envy touched Holgate's heart. This man, weighed down by the sordid cares of earth, possessed a precious secret unknown to him. The surgeon was not a scoffer, nor an unbeliever, in the accepted sense of the word; he was simply indifferent. He had never given a thought to the higher life, nor taken heed of ought beyond the concerns of the world. But his heart was not yet absolutely hardened. The curate was interested in him beyond measure. Without knowing anything of his experience, he divined that it had been of an unusual kind. He saw that his mind was questioning, and there was a prayer in the good man's heart for his guiding. He was full of sympathy for the young. His heart kindled at the sight of a young man setting out on life's journey, with all its grand possibilities before him. He remembered the glowing visions of his own youth, and, though middle life had not realized them, he had not grown soured by disappointment. It may be said

that the mere fact of having an uncongenial helpmeet need not have hindered him from going forward, or from making the best use of his talents. If you say so, my friend, I infer that you have not lived with such a woman. When a man has such a cross to bear, it is only the grace of God that can keep any faith in things human and divine alive in his heart. Such was the experience of the curate in charge at Crosshaven.

They parted at the foot of the village street, with a close hand-clasp, and another earnest 'God bless you,' spoken by the curate. Then Holgate, without heed of the rain, walked slowly on towards Doctor Radcliffe's house, with his eyes bent on the ground, full of thought.

When he reached home, he found that his colleague had gone out, and that dinner waited for him. When he entered the dining-room he found a letter on his plate. It bore the Ainsborough postmark, and was from Lydia Bolsover. Instantly his thoughts underwent a change. He felt impatient as he tore it open. If he had not forgotten her, he had at least become utterly indifferent to her. He even felt indignant that she should persecute him with her letters. He had not written to her since he came to Crosshaven, more than a fortnight before. He scanned the closely-written sheet with hurried, frowning glance. It was a loving letter, and breathed no reproach; a letter which might have touched him, because it showed an unselfish love. She mentioned that her mother had been very ill, and that Doctor Dacre feared the worst.

Then she asked a number of questions about Crosshaven, among others, if he had yet made the acquaintance of her aunt at the 'Boot and Shoe.' Holgate read it to the end, and, putting it in his pocket-book, began his dinner with a troubled expression on his face. Beyond a doubt, Lydia Bolsover considered that she had a claim upon him. She wrote as a woman writes to the man whose wife she expects to become. That brief love, if it had ever existed, had burnt out in Holgate's heart. He no longer cared for her, he had never been in earnest; why could she not look upon what had been between them as an idle pastime, to be forgotten now? I do not suppose he was aware how often he had spoken kind and even tender words to the girl, nor how full of meaning his looks had been; but she had not forgotten one. They were too sweet and precious to her to be thought of lightly. Each one was treasured in her heart with a faithfulness which would have surprised Holgate. It was a grievous mistake he had committed, making love to Lydia Bolsover, and one which would cause him some trouble. He was brooding over this, when the servant entered the room in some haste.

'There is a message from the Rectory, sir. The new folks have come, and you are to go down without delay, if you please. Mr. Barham is very ill, and wishes to see you at once.'



CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S HERITAGE.

‘To be found untired
Watching the stars out by the bed of pain,
With a pale cheek, and yet a brow inspired,
And a true heart of hope, though hope be vain.
Meekly to bear with wrong, to cheer decay,
And oh, to love through all things!’

MRS. HEMANS.

HOLGATE finished his dinner before he left the house. When he went out of doors he found that the storm had increased. A wild wind was blowing over the marshes laden with the salt from the sea. His cheeks tingled as it beat against him, but he enjoyed it thoroughly, it seemed to set all his pulses in motion. He walked quickly, and was at the Rectory in less than ten minutes. He did not feel very curious regarding the patient he was about to see. He had never been subjected to that painful experience of many a young practitioner, of being obliged to count carefully, regarding each new one as a cause for thankfulness and hope. His professional career had been so far singularly free from care. He had made no mistakes, not

a misgiving concerning his treatment or its results had as yet weighed upon his spirit. He had thus obtained thorough confidence in himself.

Signs of bustle and confusion were visible at the Rectory. As the surgeon approached the house he saw through the open door a pile of luggage standing in the hall. He stood a moment within the porch, and looked round the old-fashioned garden, which was separated from the close shrubbery by a broad, well-kept privet hedge. It was a sweet spot, suggestive even on that bleak winter day of sheltering rest.

‘Are you the doctor, sir?’ a servant asked, catching sight of him as she hurried through the hall.

‘Yes.’

He put down his umbrella, set it in the stand, and took off his dripping overcoat. The girl looked flurried, and said,—

‘Step into the dining-room, sir, and I’ll tell my mistress you have come.’

Holgate nodded, and entered the room, the maid closing the door behind him. It was not in order; the furniture was covered with holland, the windows were curtainless, the pictures draped in muslin, but the fire, which had evidently been hastily lit in the dog-grate, cast a ruddy glow over everything, and made the place home-like.

It was a long, low, narrow room, with a finely-carved oak roof and panelling of the same round the walls. The space left for the pictures was painted a rich dark shade of terra-cotta. Holgate began to feel interested, and, as the minutes went past, even curious regarding his new patient. He

wondered why he was kept waiting so long. There was a quaint Swiss timepiece on the mantel, which indicated two quarters of the hour while he waited. He could hear the faint sound of voices, and of hurrying feet, through the house, and, more than once, the loud, impatient ringing of a bell. At last, when he was growing tired of waiting, the door was quickly opened, and a lady entered the room. In the pale uncertain glimmer of the candle-light he did not see her face until she had come up to the table.

‘I have to apologize for keeping you waiting so long,’ she said in a voice whose sweetness fell upon the ears of Holgate like some familiar melody; ‘but my husband was not quite ready to see you.’

‘It did not matter. I was quite pleased to wait,’ the surgeon answered, and his tone and manner were both confused. For, now that the light fell full upon her, he knew that hers was the face he had seen, as in a dream, one moonlit night at St. Cyrus. Not so radiant now as then, but pale and worn and sad, with the shadow of an inward care dwelling perpetually upon it. Her attire was very plain; a brown serge dress, a linen collar and cuffs fastened with links of gold, no ornament save her wedding-ring.

‘I expected to see a much older gentleman,’ she said, with a faint smile, yet with a touch of concern in her voice.

‘If you would prefer to see my colleague, Doctor Radcliffe, I could go for him. I daresay he will be home now. He could be here in fifteen minutes,’ said Holgate readily.

‘Oh no; you are very kind, but when you have

taken the trouble to come, Doctor——’ She paused and looked inquiringly at him, waiting for his name.

‘Holgate.’

‘Holgate,’ she repeated, and her fine eyes wore a puzzled look. ‘How singular! I have relatives of that name. Mine is Barham. Will you please take a chair while I tell you something about my husband’s illness.’

‘May I offer you a chair, Mrs. Barham? you look tired,’ said Holgate, with gentleness. He had never looked better than at that moment, his fine face softened by that kindliness. His heart was touched by the appearance of this young girl, who ought not to have been so early burdened with the care of wifehood.

‘Thank you.’

Her beautiful smile was only a passing gleam. When she began to speak, the sadness returned to her face. Holgate stood by the table, looking down upon her with a mingling of emotions in his soul. Perhaps at that moment the man had the mastery over the physician. He felt impatient of the trouble which had robbed that sweet face of its bloom. She was a creature made for sunshine and happiness, not for the sordid cares of earth. He was yet to learn that that frail woman’s form held a capacity for endurance, a power of patience and unselfishness, before which he would stand ashamed.

‘Some months ago my husband met with an accident in the hunting-field,’ she began in quiet steady tones. ‘It was a serious fall; his horse fell above him, and his spine has been injured seriously,

I may say hopelessly. The whole system received a terrible shock.'

Holgate listened and learned something—that she did not care for her husband. A woman who loved could not so calmly have spoken of such a calamity. Why he should notice that, or why it should interest him, he did not know.

'It happened when we were paying a visit to my guardian, Sir Fulke Holgate, at St. Cyrus Abbey, and Mr. Barham was laid up there for some weeks. Directly he was conscious he insisted upon being removed to our own home at Scaris Dene. The surgeon said it was a great risk, and advised against it, but Mr. Barham insisted, and we went. He was the worse for it, and was thrown back for some time. When he began to recover the desire for change came upon him again, and he would not rest. Early in the year we came to Southport, but my husband tired of it. You see it is a great trial to him to be confined to the house. When he was in health he lived out of doors. It is natural that he should weary of everything. He constantly fancies he is out of sorts, and must have a physician seeing him every day. We have taken this house for the spring months, but whether we shall stay or not I cannot tell. I should be glad to feel settled for a little while ; and it seems a sweet, quiet spot.'

Holgate bowed. Of course he had no right to speak a word of sympathy. He was there in a professional capacity, and he must be careful to keep within it.

Mrs. Barham rose. 'Will you come up now?' she asked, and then her eyes fell as she continued, with a

slight hesitation, 'I think it right to tell you that my husband's manner is sometimes very abrupt and quick. We must be very gentle with him. To be confined to one room, as he is, is a living death.'

'It is. I am deeply sorry, madam, for him and for you.'

It was impossible not to feel the deep sincerity with which the surgeon spoke. Winifred Barham raised her eyes gratefully to his face, and a slight smile dawned upon her own. It is possible that the man's sympathy comforted her; it is certain that neither felt as if the other were a stranger.

At that moment the furious ringing of a bell sounded through the house. Mrs. Barham's colour rose, and her hands were clasped nervously together.

'That is Mr. Barham's bell. Will you come up, Doctor Holgate?'

'If you are ready.'

Holgate held open the door for her to pass out, and followed her up-stairs. As they stepped on to the landing they heard the sound of an angry voice ordering a servant to see whether the doctor had arrived. Mrs. Barham hurried forward into the room, Holgate following. It was brilliantly lighted, one of the candelabra from the drawing-room being in full blaze on the dressing-table, and a fine wood fire was sending forth a cheerful glow from the hearth. On a couch near it lay the patient the surgeon had come to see.

'This is Doctor Holgate, Guy,' said his wife, as she went swiftly to his side. Holgate could see her face, and it wore a distinctly appealing glance.

'And why in the name of wonder couldn't

Doctor Holgate come when he was sent for?' inquired Mr. Barham, with a scowl.

'He came at once, Guy. I have detained him down-stairs explaining your case to him.'

'You might have saved yourself the trouble, ma'am; I'm quite capable of explaining my own case. Sit down, can't you?' he added to Holgate. 'Now I want something to put away this confounded restlessness and pain. I want sleep, sir, and if you can make me sleep for ever, so much the better.'

Holgate sat down and drew his chair near the couch. He was the physician now, deeply interested in his patient. Calm, self-possessed, thoroughly confident, he created a favourable impression on Guy Barham, who had been accustomed, perhaps, to see his medical adviser slightly ruffled by his irritability and rude mode of address. Holgate took no notice of either. His heart was touched with pity at sight of the wreck of splendid manhood before him. If Guy Barham did not bear his cross with becoming meekness, it could not be said that it was light. To be stricken down in his young prime, and cut off for ever from that open-air life to which he had been devoted, was a hard trial. He had the sympathy even of those who had held him in light esteem; and when the surgeon's final verdict was given, and it was known that never again would the squire of Scaris Dene sit in the saddle, nor, indeed, be able to help himself, it was said that it might have been better had the accident proved fatal at the time. Such was his opinion, expressed openly, and with that choice bitterness of language of which he was master.

He was an exceptionally handsome man, but it was merely a physical beauty; his face, young as he was, bore the impress of a selfish and even a coarse nature. He did not look like one fitted to hold in his hand the happiness of a refined and highly-strung nature like that of his wife. The marriage had been none of her seeking; nay, it had been forced upon her by the indomitable will of her grandmother. The past two years had been years of bitterness for Winifred Barham. She had married without even the basis of respect, and she knew now that, in acquiescing in the will of others, she had grievously wronged herself and her husband. It had not taken him long to discover that she cared nothing for him, and it came upon him with a blow, for he had passionately and blindly loved her in his own way. But it was a selfish way, which would sacrifice nothing nor give a moment's consideration to any feelings but his own. So their union became only a mockery of the name—a miserable chain clogging both their lives. Winifred Barham, with that earnestness peculiar to her nature, did her duty to the uttermost, but found it a hard and stony pathway for her feet. An unblessed wifedom! Can any heavier curse lie upon a woman's soul?

‘I tell you I wish the brute had killed me when she was at it,’ said Mr. Barham in a savage undertone. ‘I paid three hundred guineas for her, and that was how she served me the second time I mounted her. It was a satisfaction to me to order her to be shot. I wish somebody would have as much compassion for me. Instead, they keep me

here in torture, and won't let me have the only thing that gives me a moment's peace. If they'd consult their own peace they'd let me have my way, and I'd soon put an end to the whole concern.'

Winifred Barham stepped to the side of the couch and laid her soft hand with a soothing touch on his hot head. But he impatiently thrust aside the gentle hand.

'That's what she gives me instead of morphia,' he said, with a mirthless laugh. 'Why don't you speak, Doctor Holgate? If you're only going to sit and look at me, you needn't come back. You look as if you knew your business too.'

'Your husband has been absolutely forbidden opiates, of course, Mrs. Barham?' said Holgate, as he rose.

'Talk to me, if you please,' interrupted Mr. Barham angrily. 'I am not a child or an idiot. I know what's the matter with me. Yes, that old fossil at Southport said I wasn't to have them; but I will by some means. What do I want my nerves stimulated for? That's what the stuff in that bottle's for. Throw it in the fire. It's something to kill I want, since I can't cure.'

'Oh, hush, Guy!' fell low and falteringly from the wife's sad lips.

'Hear her now! As if she wouldn't account it a stroke of uncommon good fortune,' he said jeeringly. 'You don't like the truth, eh? But you've got to swallow it, as I have to swallow the rubbish the quacks prescribe. Well, are you off, Holgate? Are you supposed to have done me any good?'

Holgate smiled at the impetuous, candid question.

‘I understand your case at least, Mr. Barham. I shall send something to ease your wakeful nights,’ he said quietly. ‘Good evening. Mrs. Barham, may I speak with you a moment, please?’

‘No, you mayn’t,’ retorted Guy Barham. ‘That’s the way she used to go plotting with them at Southport, trying to circumvent me. It’s my side you must take, sir, or not a copper.’

‘We are all on your side, Mr. Barham,’ said the surgeon, with a slight smile, as he turned to leave the room. He was inexpressibly touched by the interview; it was impossible not to feel pity for the man. It was a living death for him to be confined to that couch of pain.

‘Come back! When are you coming again? Remember you are not to neglect me. You must come every day till I tell you to stop. Win, can’t you offer him some refreshment?’

‘There is nothing unpacked yet, Guy; we have been so short a time in the house.’

‘Nothing unpacked! What are the women about? Things soon go to sixes and sevens when I’m on the shelf,’ he fumed angrily. ‘Can’t you sit down and wait a minute, Holgate? I haven’t said half I wanted to. You can’t understand anything about me, though you pretend you do. You haven’t spoken half a dozen words to me since you came in. Sit down and tell me something about the place. They will drag me from one place to another. I can’t get rest night nor day for them.’

‘It is you who will not rest, Guy,’ his wife said.

‘If you had taken the surgeon’s advice we would never have left Scaris Dene.’

‘So she says to get out of the scrape. It’s a wretched affair, Holgate, when a man is under a woman’s thumb. She looks soft and sweet enough, doesn’t she—a patient angel, and all that? Don’t you believe it. Those meek-faced kind are the worst to deal with. They can’t be honest with a fellow. They give him sweet words when hate is in their souls. But they say that is a woman’s way.’

Again Winifred Barham’s colour rose, and she left the room. Accustomed as she was to insult and humiliation, she found it at that moment peculiarly trying. Holgate lingered a few minutes talking with the patient, and when he at length was allowed to go, he found her waiting for him in the hall. He saw her over the balustrade, standing against the table, and was struck by the hopelessness of her attitude. He did not marvel at it very much. The life she lived in that sick-room, subjected to the vagaries of a selfish and exacting invalid, must be one of curious torture. But how far short of the sad reality did his surmises fall!

‘Well,’ she said, when he reached her side, ‘what is to be done?’

‘He must not have the opiate he is craving for, Mrs. Barham,’ he answered gravely. ‘I daresay other surgeons have warned you of its danger.’

‘Yes,’ she said quietly, ‘they have.’

Her mouth trembled. She clasped her hands nervously before her. Her face was very pale and worn, her sweet eyes encircled by purple shadows.

She had a hard trial, a heavy cross to bear. On her, the wife, the burden must fall. None could relieve her of it, nor even bear a share for her.

‘Is there no likelihood,’ she asked after a moment, ‘that the craving will grow less?’

‘Yes, if it has nothing to feed upon it must die out,’ he answered. ‘It is because every drop strengthens the desire that it is imperative it should be altogether kept from him. It has a strong hold upon him evidently.’

‘Yes; it was given to him for the pain at first, and he still imagines the pain as severe, though I am assured it is not so. The surgeon at Southport told me the craving for morphia was worse to bear than pain. I can see that. It seems cruel to keep it from him. He has no reason, you see, and we cannot wonder at it. We must be very gentle with him. It is a heavy cross.’

‘It is; but not heavier than yours, madam,’ Holgate said involuntarily. Her colour slightly rose, but she did not resent his words. She seemed to know him kind, true, keenly sympathetic, and her heart was crying out desolately for some human aid.

‘You will come soon and often,’ she said anxiously. ‘I think he has taken kindly to you. I was very anxious; he is so full of moods and whims.’

‘How did they ever permit him to travel, Mrs. Barham? He ought never to have left home.’

‘They did not permit him,’ she answered, with a faint smile. ‘But my husband knows no law, Mr. Holgate, but his own whim. Good-night.’



CHAPTER XI.

A REVELATION.

‘Wearier with heart-sorrows
Than with the weight of years.’

E. B. BROWNING.

‘**W**HAT has come over you, Holgate? I seem to have seen so little of you for weeks. Surely you are busy?’

It was the curate who spoke. He met Holgate as he was coming leisurely up the street one July evening, with Daisy by his side.

‘I am very busy,’ Holgate answered, as he shook hands with the curate and stooped to pat Daisy’s fair cheek. ‘I have my own work and Doctor Radcliffe’s to do, you know.’

‘I heard he was off. It shows what unbounded confidence he must have in you. It is twelve years since I came to the Haven, and I have never known him take more than a day’s holiday.’

Holgate smiled. His relations with his colleague were wholly pleasant. They were like brothers in their work.

‘I am glad he is enjoying his trip; he deserves it. How is Mrs. Frew?’

‘Not well; I wish you would look up and see her. The warm weather tries her, and she will *not* go out. I wish you would try and impress upon her the necessity of spending a part of each day out of doors.’

‘I shall look in this evening when I come back from the Rectory. I am going there now.’

‘Ah, that is a sad case, Doctor Holgate! Sickness of body and of mind. I am deeply sorry for that poor girl. She has a heavy cross.’

Holgate said nothing. The child Daisy, looking at him earnestly, for she loved him, saw a strange dark shadow creep over his face.

‘It is a sad case,’ was his brief reply.

‘I suppose there is no hope?’ said the curate inquiringly. ‘What is the disease?’

‘Paralysis of the spinal cord. It is only a matter of time. The state of irritation in which he keeps himself will shorten his days, that is all.’

‘Do they intend remaining the summer here?’

‘No one knows. They might leave to-day or to-morrow if Mr. Barham took it in his head,’ returned Holgate. ‘I must go, Mr. Frew. I shall see you in an hour or so.’

‘Did you know that Mr. Barham has refused to see me every time I have called?’ asked the curate, lingering a moment.

‘He told me so.’

‘Poor fellow! it shows a mind ill at ease, when the very thought of the messenger of the truth

irritates him. The opportunity is yours, Doctor Holgate.'

'How?'

'I mean that it may be your duty to speak the word in season,' said the curate, with a bright smile.

Holgate reddened, and, stooping, laid his hand on Daisy's sunny curls.

'I see you often on the sands with Captain Silas, Miss Daisy. When will you take me for a stroll, eh?'

'Any time, Doctor Holgate,' answered the child, smiling up into his face.

'Your little maid needs a rose in her cheek, Mr. Frew,' said the surgeon. 'I think I must take her in hand. Would you take my drugs, Daisy?'

'If you told me they would do me good,' answered the child in her grave, old-fashioned way 'and if they did not taste *very* badly.'

'I thought I had found a model child, but she has her conditions like the rest,' laughed Holgate. 'Good evening just now.'

'Good evening. You did not like my hint, Holgate,' said the curate.

'If I did not, it was because I felt that I was in as great or greater need than my patient, Mr. Frew,' returned the surgeon almost bitterly, and, lifting his hat, strode away, leaving the curate to ponder on his words.

Holgate quickened his pace, nodded to Captain Silas enjoying his evening pipe at his cottage door, and passed on to the Rectory gate. He felt his heart beat quicker as he strode up the leafy lane

by the side of the church, and turned into the shrubbery which grew thickly before the house. The way had become very familiar to him; he was sometimes at the Rectory three and four times in a day, whenever the squire in his whims sent for him. He remonstrated at first, saying he could do nothing; but the squire had silenced him in his usual peremptory fashion, and there had been no more said about it. These visits were full of peculiar experiences for Holgate, and were beginning to be things of moment in his life.

He was shown directly up to the drawing-room, into which the invalid had been moved soon after his arrival. He did not know a moment's rest; and, had they given him his way, would have changed into a new room every day. Holgate, however, had absolutely forbidden any further change. In his hands Guy Barham was wonderfully docile. His couch was drawn near to the low, wide window, from which there could be obtained a magnificent view of the sea and of the towns on the opposite coast. When the surgeon entered the room that evening, it was flooded by the radiance of the setting sun. The invalid was alone, and his face wore a wonderfully calm expression. Perhaps something of the sunset peace and beauty had touched his fretful spirit.

‘Hulloa, Holgate! sit down,’ he said, turning his head. ‘Why didn’t you come sooner? It’s confoundedly wearisome here when a fellow has only women to talk to.’

‘I came when I could. I have other work to do, Mr. Barham,’ the surgeon answered pleasantly.

‘Ah, I suppose so. Poor sort of a life attending to sick folks. Don’t you get sick of it?’

‘Never.’

‘I don’t know how anybody in health can bear to have anything to do with it. I never could when I was well. Do you know what I was thinking lying here, Holgate? How splendid the Dene will be looking just now! Harvest will be in full swing, and the birds getting strong and wild for the Twelfth.’

Holgate could not help being touched by the words. The man’s heart was yearning over the old, stirring, active life, his old haunts and occupations were constantly before him, taunting him with the free and happy past. But in a moment any feeling of sympathy vanished at the next words.

‘My wife is croaking about going back, but I won’t. I like this place. As well die here as anywhere else. It’ll be a relief to her when that comes; you couldn’t tell her anything that would please her better.’

‘You are not just to Mrs. Barham, sir,’ he said quickly. He could *not* sit quietly and hear him speak of her in such a tone.

‘Oh, perhaps not. Of course you’ll take her side; they all do, and think I’m a brute. They don’t know her as well as I do. You think I make a slave of her here, I suppose. I’ve seen you look as if you thought it. But she’s *my* wife, and she shall bear my burden, if I choose.

Holgate remained silent, because he could scarcely utter what was in his mind. It was a marvel to him that this man could be so oblivious to the self-sacrifice daily made for him by the magnitude of his wife's devotion and care.

'She'll likely ask your advice about leaving this place, but you must back me up. If we were at Dene, she'd be in league with old Lady Kate, and they'd turn me over to the servants. Do you understand me?'

'I understand what you are saying.'

'And you'll back me up?'

'Ah, I didn't say that. It wouldn't do you any harm to move to Scaris Dene. You are better than you were, Mr. Barham.'

'Am I? but I can't cure, can I?'

The surgeon shook his head.

'How long have I to hang on in this style?'

'I could hardly specify a time, Mr. Barham.'

'Oh, you won't, that's nearer the truth. You needn't be afraid. If I were to hear I was to croak to-morrow, it would be the best news I ever heard in my life.'

Holgate was not a religious man, but it did occur to him to wonder whether Guy Barham had ever given a thought to that which is beyond.

'I say, I've always been going to ask you something,' said Guy Barham, after intently studying the surgeon's face for a few seconds. 'Where do you belong? Are you a Lancashire man?'

'No.'

Holgate's colour rose in spite of himself.

‘Know anything of St. Cyrus, eh? that precious nest where I got my mate. There’s a look of them about you sometimes; yet it could hardly be.’

‘Your imagination is very brilliant, Mr. Barham.’

‘Not singularly,—stranger things have happened. There were two brothers besides Fulke—Bevis and Denis. I thought you might be Denis Holgate’s son, that’s all. Your name’s Denis, isn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Curious; but I daresay it is only a coincidence. You couldn’t have belonged to that precious set and not have known it. They’ve the pride of a Czar among them. If you saw Fulke Holgate, you’d like to kick him, ninth baronet of St. Cyrus though he be.’

At that moment the door of the inner room was opened, and Mrs. Barham came out. As the surgeon turned to greet her, he could not but think how fair she was, and how very, very young. She was in white, a soft, heavy serge, clinging about her in straight, graceful folds. A scarlet geranium made a touch of colour at her throat, and seemed to give to her pale cheek a tinge of its own brilliance. Holgate wondered at his own feelings as he looked upon that fair, calm, womanly face. He knew that it was seldom absent from his mind, that she was bound up with every thought of his life. The physician was no longer master of the man. The daily picture of her absolute abnegation of self, her angel patience, her long-suffering and tender care for the man who called her wife, not knowing how great his privilege, had aroused

in the surgeon the highest instincts of manhood. He would have defended her, helped her, borne the burden for her, he would have stood between her a shield from every harsh word, but he had no right.

His infinite compassion had become the cradle of another feeling, more deep and absorbing and bitter-sweet than any that had as yet touched his heart. If it could be called by the name of love, it could be nothing but ennobling, because it was wholly pure. He had never met with any one in the least like her; she had revealed to him a side of womanhood with which he had never come in contact, of the existence of which even he had not dreamed. He knew himself happy in her presence, but he looked at her face as one might look at the face of one far removed in goodness and purity. He did not himself know that he loved her, only he knew that she was a sweet revelation to him; that she had awakened in him dreams and yearnings which had never touched him until he met her. She made him feel weak, erring, mean, and despicable; she had shown him the littleness of what he had set up and worshipped. She had made him ashamed, not of his past life, but of his part in it. She had given him kindly, pitiful, remorseful thoughts of his mother and of Rhoda, and yet she had not spoken very much to him. He had never had more than a few minutes' talk with her, and that on the most general topics. Is there not an influence ten thousand times more potent than any words, however high-sounding and eloquent,—the influence of a quiet, brave, patient Christian life?

Winifred Barham's life, then, was a sweet and silent sermon, which had sunk deep into the heart of Holgate, awakening there impulses which had long lain dormant.

'We think him much better, Doctor Holgate,' she said in her quiet way. 'What if Crosshaven air, Guy, should work a miracle in your case?'

She stood by the couch and looked down upon him with sweet compassion in her eyes. But it was not the look he cared for. Guy Barham loved his wife, and he knew that he had not the power to awaken a responsive love in her heart. The wide difference in their tastes, habits, and disposition forbade it. There cannot be love where there is not a single thought in common. Not long after marriage Guy Barham had learned how Winifred Vivian had been coerced in the matter, and it had embittered him beyond measure. It was nothing to him that she was to him a quiet, gentle, obedient wife, who made his happiness her first care; he looked at everything she did from a distorted point of view. His miserable jealousy and distrust made life a perpetual burden to her. Sometimes despair was in her heart.

'Work a cure!' he said, with his habitual sneer. 'That would be a fine disappointment for you, wouldn't it, Holgate? I haven't much hope of that, but I'll live long enough to make you weary for my exodus, my lady; I'll live long enough to make a second marriage for you out of the question. Tell Lady Kate that, if you like, with my compliments.'

Holgate saw her eyelids quiver, the only sign that she heard his insulting words. She had been made to feel keenly humiliated many times, not only in Holgate's presence, but before the servants; it mattered nothing to Guy Barham who was there to hear, he would make her colour rise and her eyes droop with shame. He called it paying her back for the deceit she had practised on him. He had forgotten the hot haste with which he had wooed and won her; he had forgotten how she had told him plainly she had not learned to care for him, that she feared she never should; he had forgotten the reluctance with which her promise was given, how she had begged the marriage to be delayed until they had a firmer basis of affection upon which to build their altar. Guy Barham's memory was a convenient one, only retaining what was useful for himself.

'I say, Holgate, has there ever been a cure for what I have?' he asked, recurring to the subject as the surgeon was about to leave the room.

'I have never known nor heard of one,' he returned briefly.

'How long will it be before I croak, eh?' he repeated. 'See how my lady listens, like a cat listening for a mouse. You're a wise man to remain single and free, Holgate, for, by Jove, women-folks would lead you a pretty dance! You needn't go already.'

'I must. I have to see Mrs. Frew, Mr. Barham. Good-night.'

'Is Mrs. Frew ill?' asked Winifred. 'I am

sorry I have not had time to return her call. I am much occupied.'

'And better than you would be gadding about the parson's house,' interposed her husband rudely. 'He has been here several times,—the parson, I mean. I daresay he thinks I need him, but I'm not going to pull a long face and read the Bible now. I'm neither a hypocrite nor a coward. You can tell the parson that, if you like, Holgate. What are you crying for, Win?'

She made no answer, but passed out of the room. There were moments when her heart entirely failed her; this was one.

Holgate did not prolong his stay. It cost him an effort to speak with courtesy to Guy Barham. With a curt good evening, he left the room, mentally resolving that he would let some days elapse before he came back. His visits did no good to any one, they certainly were no pleasure to him.

As he took his hat from the hall table, the dining-room door was opened, and Mrs. Barham appeared. She was now quite calm, but very pale, and wistful, and sad.

'Mr. Barham is better, is he not, Doctor Holgate?' she asked.

'He is certainly better than when he came to Crosshaven.'

'Do you think he could be taken home? I am very anxious to be at home, near my grandmother. I feel as if this could not go on, Doctor Holgate.'

'Indeed it cannot,' he said, a trifle unsteadily. 'I am afraid you are feeling very ill.'

‘I am very tired,’ she said. ‘And the heart fails sometimes. I am very much alone here.’

‘Few women would do as you have done, Mrs. Barham. It is to your splendid care your husband owes his present comparative ease.’

She smiled slightly.

‘I have tried to be firm, and I think his craving for morphia is nearly killed. It only troubles him occasionally. It was a hard struggle. I do not think I could go through it again.’ She drew a quick breath, as if the memory of it caught her heart. ‘Will you tell me, please, how the disease will progress?’

‘The paralysis will creep upward till it reaches the heart, Mrs. Barham,’ answered the surgeon briefly.

‘How long?’

‘The time varies. Mr. Barham has a splendid constitution, and, unless some complication arise, he may live a year or two, or even three years.’

‘I pray that he may be spared until he is a changed man,’ she said, more to herself than to him. After a moment she raised her sad eyes and fixed them full on the surgeon’s face.

‘Doctor Holgate, our way of life is laid very bare before you. You will respect it, will you not? I could not bear that any one should know, except yourself.’

Holgate’s colour rose. He was deeply hurt.

‘God forbid! Give me credit for common sense, Mrs. Barham, if for nothing else,’ he said quickly.

‘I have wronged you,’ she said hurriedly; ‘indeed

I scarcely know at times what I say or how I act. I am over-driven. Pray for me, that I may have patience, that I may not have hard thoughts. *He* needs all our pity and our care.'

The words were wrung from her. She was indeed, as she said, over-driven in mind and body. Holgate did not trust himself to speak. For the first time in their acquaintance, their hands met in a close, sympathetic clasp. And immediately he left the house. He was glad to be out of doors, to feel the fresh sea wind blowing about him. If it could only blow away the dark thoughts with which his heart was riven! As he emerged from the shadow of the leafy lane, a fly came rattling along the dusty road from the station. As it passed, he glanced at it carelessly, wondering whether it had brought the first summer visitor to the Haven. There was a pile of luggage on the box, and looking out from the side glass was the face of Lydia Bolsover.





CHAPTER XII.

A GENTLE HEART.

‘Shall there be rest from toil, be truce from sorrow,
Be living green upon the sward?’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.



CAPTAIN SILAS came leisurely up the street, staff in hand, keeping an eye on the road down which his little favourite might be expected to come. Their evening strolls had not been so regular of late; Mrs. Frew not being well, the care of the baby fell upon Daisy. She was willing, dear heart, but not able for the task. Captain Silas shaded his eyes from the sun, and looked up the slope to Woodbine Cottage, but there was no sign of his little friend. The road was quite deserted, but in the lane leading to the Rectory a lady was walking to and fro in the sun, with a slow and listless step. After his leisurely survey Captain Silas strolled up the street to the ‘Boot and Shoe.’ His face wore a singularly restful and happy expression, the look of one at peace with God and man. His lifework was done, as he often said, and he was only wait-

ing the happy gale which would waft him into port.

‘A foine evenin’, Cicely,’ he called out heartily, when more than a hundred yards from the inn.

‘A foine evenin’!’ Cicely answered back, but without her usual heartiness. Captain Silas missed the cheerful ring in her voice, and, looking at her face, saw that it wore a troubled expression. Cicely must be out of sorts, a rare thing for her.

‘A’ weel in th’ “Boot an’ Shoe,” Cicely?’ asked the Captain, pausing at the door.

‘A’ weel. How’s thysen, Cap’n? Th’ world usin’ tha weel, eh?’

‘Ay, nivver better, tho’ I’m gettin’ as owd an’ battered as th’ *Lucy Wright*, bless her! Thou’s gotten a stranger to th’ “Boot an’ Shoe,” I’m towld, Cicely.’

Cicely nodded, and her face darkened. She stepped back, closed the inner door, and then came out and leaned up against the porch.

‘Ay, I’ve gotten whoam Mary Anne’s gel, Cap’n, an’ it winna work, I see. She ain’t like Mary Anne, who wur allus as soft as a pat o’ butter i’ July. Hoo’s her feyther’s gel, Cap’n, an’ hoo winna suit me nor Sutton.’

‘That’s bad, Cicely. I heerd th’ lads sayin’ hoo wur a gradely foine lass too.’

Cicely laughed, a short, significant laugh.

‘Th’ Haven lads may save themsens th’ trouble, tell ’em fra me. Miss Bolsover winna look their way. She’s after higher game. I mun speak to tha, Cap’n Silas; there noan a safe cretur i’ th’

place but thysen to tell a thing to, an' I durstna mention her name to Sutton; he's as mad as can be. Hoo's efter the young doctor, Cap'n. Didna I tell thee he wur at Waveney, wheer Mary Anne lived, afore he coom here?'

'I moind summat on it, Cicely.'

'Hoo says hoo's to marry him. But hoo's been here three days, an' he's nivver looked nigh. That doesna look very loike marryin', does it, Cap'n?'

'Noan, it doesn't. I thought tha sister's lass wur a school-teacher, Cicely.'

'So hoo wur, silly cretur, so hoo wur; fifty pound a year, an' house-room found. Her mother died, ov coorse, but that wur noan reason why hoo should throw away her bread. Hoo says hoo's come to pay us a long visit, hoo does. I wur vera near tellin' her hoo moight have waited till hoo wur asked.'

'Thou's sore ruffled th' wrang way, Cicely; I nivver seed tha' so put out,' said the Captain, with real concern. Cicely and he were old and warm friends, each had proved the other's worth.

'I tell tha I conna bear'd, an' I winna. Hoo's not lift a hand to help. Tha should ha' seen her turn up her nose when I axed her to help at table for tha men t'other neet. Sutton winna stand it, either. He's quiet, but he con say a bit sharp word, an' he will to Lyddy afore she's mony days owder. Hoo's jes' her feyther, as I said. Thou's heerd me speak o' Bolsover. If tha had known him, Cap'n, he'd a' made tha sick. Mary Anne would ha' crawled on her very knees to serve him. Mony a time have I tow'd her, I wished I

had her chance, I'd made a better mon o' him. He wur jes' a great, ugly, domineerin' lump. Me an' him didna pu' thagither. He knawed I saw through him. The gel has all his pride an' his close way. Hoo didna tell me aboot th' doctor; I had to foind that out, an' it about turned my stomach.'

'What turned your stomach, Aunt Cicely?' asked a cool, calm, sweet voice, and the inner door opened, and a tall, womanly figure in white appeared on the threshold. Her eyebrows were slightly arched, a cool, amused smile played about her well-formed mouth. She had overheard the greater part of her aunt's speech, and they knew it.

'This is my niece, Lyddy Bolsover, fra Waveney, Cap'n,' said Cicely, with reddening face.

'Happy to see tha, miss, for tha aunt's sake. Her an' me's owd friends,' said the Captain, taking off his hat and offering his weather-beaten hand. Miss Bolsover gave a cool little nod, but took no notice of the offered hand.

'Is that a' th' manners thy school-teachin's taught tha, Lyddy?' asked her aunt severely. 'Doesna tha see Cap'n Silas offerin' ta shake hands wi' tha?'

'I bowed to Captain Silas, Aunt Cicely; good manners required no more,' said Lydia. 'May I go for a stroll on these lovely marshes? they look so tempting.'

'If tha wur civil, Lyddy, th' Cap'n moight offer fur to tak' tha himsen. He knaws ivvry bit o' them fra Hesketh to Formby, and ivvry bit o' grass that blows on th' sand-hills knaws him.'

'Oh, I'll not trouble him; I am not particularly

interested in the grass. Good-evening, Captain ; thanks all the same,' said Lydia, and walked away from the door, putting up her white lace sunshade, which had a black bow on it to match the ribbons on her muslin gown.

'Hoo is a foine lass an' no mistak', Cicely,' said the Captain, looking after her admiringly. 'The doctor moight do worse. They'd mak' a gradely couple ; doesna tha think so ?'

'Well enough, well enough ; but it'll nivver be. It's on'y to thysen, Cap'n Silas, I durst whisper that I doubt he's lost his heart somewheer else, wheer he ha'l noan bezniss ta lose it. Hoo's a dear, sweet, heart-broken cretur at th' Rectory, Cap'n.'

'Tha conna mean that that foine young chap has lost hissel' to another mon's wife, Cicely ?' said the Captain, shaking his grey head doubtfully.

'I mean jes' that, Cap'n.'

'I durstna believe it on him, Cicely. He's a foine chap. Him an' me's had mony a good talk, an' I nivver seen noan nonsense aboot him. He's often there, but it's th' squire. They do say theer's noan livin' wi' him. I see that young choild, his wife, walkin' i' the lane. It's a soar handful for her, poor lass.'

'Ay, it is ; but I mun tell tha how I fand oot aboot th' doctor, Cap'n. He wur in here wan neet, an' I happen't to say summat aboot her sudden loike, an' at that vera minit hoo went by the door, an' I seed it in his face. God help tha, lad ! said I in my heart, an' I nivver spak o't, noan even to Sutton. He'd a' laughed at me, but I wurna mista'en.'

‘Ay, ay; tha had need to say God help th’ lad, if it be true, Cicely, fur it’s a soar thing fur mon or woman to set theer hearts wheer there’s noan hope. I hope theer’s that in oor young doctor, Cicely, that’ll mak’ a mon o’ him i’ this trouble then. I hev gradely hopes ov him; I think he’ll trample it underfoot.’

‘I hope so. Theer’s Sutton comin’. That Sally ov ours is gotten beyant ivvrything wi’ laziness. I see her hobnobbins wi’ thy Jerry whiles on th’ sand-hills; I believe she’s larnt some o’ his foine tricks,’ said Cicely humorously, and with a nod she went in-doors to see that the kettle was boiling for Sutton’s tea. Captain Silas continued his slow course up the street, stopping every few minutes for a word with a neighbour, or to pat a little child on the head. The very dogs came smelling kindly about his feet, recognising in him a protector and a friend.

While Captain Silas was taking his solitary walk, little Daisy, having succeeded in singing the fretful baby to sleep, stole out of doors, intending to run down and see her old friend. But as she was speeding down the middle of the road, the lady walking alone in the Rectory Lane saw her, and, leaning over the gate, smiled and asked her to come and speak to her.

‘You are Mr. Frew’s little girl, I think?’ she said; and her voice was so sweet that it sounded like music in the child’s ears.

‘Yes, I am Daisy Frew,’ she answered, smiling too. She had never seen anything so lovely as this sweet lady in her robe of clinging white,

with the sunlight on her face and in her golden hair.

‘Is your mamma better, dear? I heard she was very ill.’

Instantly the child’s face grew very grave.

‘Oh no! mamma is very ill. She lies in bed all day, so quiet and still. Papa sits by her all the time, and I keep baby, and try to get the boys to be quiet.’

‘You! Poor little tender mite! you are only a baby yourself. And how old is this baby you keep?’

‘Baby is eleven months; he is a dear baby, but so lazy. He won’t even sit good by himself.’

‘And do you carry him about yourself?’

‘Yes, there is no one else.’

‘Does it not tire you?’

‘Sometimes my back aches, and if papa sees, he makes me give baby to Martha, or takes him himself. But I don’t like that. Papa has a great deal to do, and is often tired and sad.’

‘Your unselfishness shames me, Daisy,’ said Mrs. Barham, and the tears stood in her eyes.

‘I don’t quite know what you say, ma’am,’ said Daisy shyly, wondering to see tears in the lady’s eyes.

‘Shall I tell you? I was feeling very sad and very weary and discontented, my darling, and I have learned from you that I have been wrong.’

‘Have you a great deal to do, and does your back ache?’ asked Daisy timidly. ‘I think it must, your face is so white.’

‘My heart aches, dear, and that is worse than

my back,' answered Winifred, with a faint smile. 'May I kiss you?'

'If you please,' answered Daisy, and uplifted her sweet thin face very willingly to the beautiful one above her.

'Do you think you could come down some day and have tea with me? The strawberries are ripening in the garden already.'

'Oh, are they? I couldn't come till mamma is better, and baby tries to walk; I have charge of him, you know.'

'You poor little mite!' repeated Winifred Barham pitifully. 'You must be your father's pet, I think.'

'I'm his sunbeam and his heart's comfort, he says,' answered the child simply. 'May I go now? I am going to see Captain Silas. Do you know Captain Silas?'

'Is that the old fisherman, with the lame leg and the stick, who lives down in yon little cottage?'

'That's him. He's my chum, papa says. I love him next to papa. He knows everything; I know a lot of things he has told me. I know where the sea-daisies come out first on the sand-hills. They'll be there now, only I haven't been down since mamma was ill. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, my darling. Tell Captain Silas he must spare you to me one day. I shall want a long visit,' said Winifred, kissing the child again.

She watched her out of sight, and then, acting on a sudden impulse, she passed out into the road, and began to ascend the slope to the curate's house. She had no gloves on her hands, and wore a garden

hat, with a bunch of early flowers in her belt. In that girlish garb she looked very young, yet there was a sad, proud dignity about her too, which seemed to tell that she had had some experience of life. A few minutes' walk brought her to the gate of Woodbine Cottage. It was open, and she entered at once, looking almost compassionately round at the poor neglected garden, so different from the trim, well-kept borders at the Rectory.

The door was open, and the fretful wailing of a baby greeted her as she approached it. After she had knocked twice, an untidy maid appeared, looking as cross as could be.

'Can I see Mr. Frew?' the lady asked kindly.

'I dunno, but yo' can come in or I see. Theer's trouble i' th' hoose; the missus is laid up. Yo' didna' see a little gel on the road, did yo'?'

'I met little Miss Frew on the way.'

'I wonner wheer she's flyin' to noo. She mun keep that choild; I'm noan fit to do a' that's to be done. I'm nigh trotted off ma legs, I tell yo', ma'am,' said Martha complainingly, as she led the way to the sitting-room. The baby was there, fretfully wailing, and making strenuous efforts to get out of his cradle. Martha lifted him with no gentle hand, and gave him a cross shake, as she bade him be quiet.

'Give him to me while you see your master. If he can leave Mrs. Frew, say Mrs. Barham would be glad to see him for a few minutes.'

'I durstna leave th' choild wi'tha. He's that cross, an' see his pinny. I ain't fit to wash for 'em all.'

‘Never mind, go now,’ said Mrs. Barham firmly, and Martha felt impelled to obey. Pleased perhaps with the sweet smile and bright eyes of his new nurse, the child sat still on her knees, looking up with round, wondering eyes into her face.

He was a pretty child, but delicate and uncared for; out of her pity for him Winifred Barham could forget the soiled pinafore, the sticky, unwashed face, the tangled curls. He was sitting quietly on her knee playing with the bunch of seals at her watch-chain when Martha returned to say her master would be down presently.

‘All right,’ said Winifred Barham, with a pleasant nod. ‘I shall keep baby till Mr. Frew comes down, and perhaps by that time Daisy will have come back.’

Nothing loth, Martha retired, but in a few minutes there was another smart knock at the front door, and the noise of some one entering and going up-stairs. After an interval, Mr. Frew came down and entered the sitting-room. He started, and his pale face flushed at sight of the child on Mrs. Barham’s knee.

‘Good evening, Mr. Frew. You see I am having a new experience,’ she said, with a swift bright smile which put him at his ease at once. ‘Forgive my calling, but I saw your little daughter in the lane, and she told me how ill Mrs. Frew is. I came to express my sympathy, and to ask if I could do anything. Does she need wine or anything? Nay, don’t look distressed. What is the use of these things to us if we cannot make them of use to others? It will be a real kindness to me.’

‘I thank you. Your sympathy is very sweet, madam,’ said the curate, and now that the flush had left his face, she saw its haggard paleness. ‘How is your husband to-day?’

‘Much as usual, thank you,’ she said, and bent her head low over the child on her knee. ‘I left him asleep, and stole out for a touch of the sunshine. One gets weary in-doors on such a day as this. But tell me about Mrs. Frew.’

‘She is very ill,’ answered the curate, passing his hand wearily across his brow. ‘I fear there is no hope. When I think of my five children, Mrs. Barham, I am unmanned.’

‘What does the doctor say? If any change would do good, if he recommends anything money can buy, pray do not hesitate, Mr. Frew,’ said Winifred Barham, her eyes shining in her earnestness. ‘It would be nothing to me, nothing in comparison with the help you have given me from Sabbath to Sabbath. For Daisy’s sake, then, if for no other reason. She read me a lesson in patience this very evening in the lane.’

A gleam of love for the absent child lit up the curate’s pale features.

‘Many a lesson, Mrs. Barham, has Daisy read to me. She is thoughtful beyond her years. Sometimes she weighs upon my heart. Life has many cares; but for the thought, the certainty that we lie in a loving Hand, human hearts would fail. You too, I think, have often felt it.’

‘Oh, I have—I do every day I live! Sometimes I cannot bear it,’ said Winifred Barham passionately.

‘But I shall try to keep what you say always green in my heart.’

At that moment there was another tread on the stair, the door was opened, and Doctor Holgate entered. He started back at sight of Mrs. Barham. His surprise was very marked. Her colour heightened a little as she bade him good evening. Holgate himself seemed a trifle embarrassed.

‘Mrs. Barham is acting the Good Samaritan to this neglected household, doctor,’ said the curate, with a smile. ‘Well, how did you find my wife to-day?’

‘Not weaker. There is little change, but she is very languid. I wish I could rouse her, Mr. Frew,’ said the surgeon gravely. ‘Where is our little nursemaid to-day?’

‘I met her on her way to see Captain Silas,’ said Winifred Barham.

‘Ay, ay, she misses her old friend; they are very fond of each other. Must you go now, Mrs. Barham? Come then, you rogue,’ Gilbert Frew added to the child. ‘I don’t wonder you are subdued, my boy. Won’t you leave your charm behind you? Daisy would be glad of it sometimes.’

‘I must come up again and do what I can. Good evening, Mr. Frew. You will grant my request, will you not? It is so little we can do in this world to help each other.’

The curate wrung her hand. Her sweet sympathy, the outcome of a true womanly nature, was very precious to him. Holgate had little to say.

He even walked half-way down the slope to the Rectory Lane without uttering a word. Why? Because he was unutterably happy. He knew that to be near this gracious presence was sufficient.

‘What hope is there for Mrs. Frew?’ she asked at length, not embarrassed by the silence. She felt at home with him. He had been a true friend to her in her need. She was grateful, as yet nothing more.

‘Very little. She will not even make up her mind to get well. There is a great deal in the will, Mrs. Barham.’

‘I believe that.’

‘Has Mr. Barham been asking for me to-day?’

‘Oh yes, more than once. Will you look in this evening?’

‘I hardly think it. I do no good, Mrs. Barham.’

‘Oh, you do. We look forward to your visits; I should miss you, Doctor Holgate.’

‘Should you?’

‘Yes.’

She uplifted her sweet, clear eyes unfalteringly to his face. He averted his from that look.

‘Who is this lady in white coming up the road? The first of the summer comers to the Haven, eh?’ she said lightly.

Holgate started.

‘No, that is Cicely Sutton’s niece. Will you excuse me leaving you here, Mrs. Barham? I know her, and I must speak with her for a moment.’



CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN SCORNEO.

‘When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not ;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.’

SHELLEY.

MRS. BARHAM shook hands with Holgate and turned into the Rectory Lane. He proceeded down the road, and met Lydia Bolsover face to face. She put down her parasol, and gave her head a slight bow.

‘How do you do?’ was all she said.

‘Won’t you shake hands with me, Miss Bolsover?’ he asked lamely. A feeling of intense discomfort possessed him. She was so cool, so self-possessed. She had certainly the advantage of him. He knew he had not treated her well, and felt small in her presence.

‘Not just now. You are not very pleased, I think, to see me, Doctor Holgate. I shall be sorry if I make Crosshaven unpleasant for you ; but my mother is dead, and I could not stay in Waveney ; I had nowhere else to go.’

She spoke quite quietly, but with a thinly-veiled sarcasm. Her eyes, too, had a curious gleam, her lips curled, her voice had a hard ring in it. She was suffering more keenly than he knew of. He did not do her justice.

‘Why should you make Crosshaven uncomfortable for me, Lydia?’ he asked.

‘Miss Bolsover, if you please,’ she said coldly. ‘I will not detain you. No doubt your time is valuable.’

‘I am not in a hurry. Will you walk a little way with me, Lydia?’

‘If you have anything to say to me, you may say it now. I have been on the shore for an hour, and have tired of it. I intended going up this way for a change.’

She was not speaking the strict truth. From the sand-hills behind Silas Rimmer’s cottage she had seen Holgate go up the road and enter Woodbine Cottage, and had come purposely to meet him. Her heart had hungered to hear him speak; but he did not dream of it.

As she spoke she put up her sunshade again and began to walk on, Holgate accompanying her. Winifred Barham, looking round from the farther end of the lane, saw them ascend the slope together. They said nothing till they had passed Woodbine Cottage, and then the road was very quiet and secluded, with trees on either side.

‘I have not behaved well to you, Lydia,’ he said in a low voice, and very humbly; for he was con-

scious of his own shortcomings, and was willing to admit it with manly honesty. Lately Denis Holgate had begun to examine himself, to look unpleasant truths straight in the face, with the result that his self-conceit was now considerably lowered. The people with whom he had come in close contact were influencing him for good. They had shown him how lovely a thing is an unselfish heart.

‘No, you have not behaved well to me. I wonder you dare look me in the face, Denis Holgate,’ said the woman by his side, with a slight touch of passion. ‘I am entitled to some explanation. I may as well tell you that brought me to Crosshaven. What have you to say?’

Holgate was silent for a moment. How bitterly he regretted the folly of those foolish days at Waveney! How he marvelled that he could ever have made love to this cold, scornful, strong-minded woman! He was in a curious position. Convicted of a grave mistake, he walked by Lydia Bolsover’s side as a culprit might walk by the side of the judge who he knows must sentence and condemn him.

‘I do not know what to say to you, Lydia, except that I deeply regret the past.’

‘Then you have changed towards me?’ she asked quietly, and bit her lip to still its rebellious quiver.

‘I think we both made a mistake,’ he answered.

‘That is the usual form in which a man draws back from such an engagement,’ she said in high,

ringing tones. 'But I believe you are right. We both made a mistake.'

'I was wholly and entirely to blame,' said Denis Holgate hurriedly. 'I spoke to you without thinking words which ought never to have been uttered. I was thoughtless and foolish, and I fancied I cared for you.'

'But you know better now?'

'I will tell you honestly, Lydia; it will be better for us both. I do *not* care for you as a man should care for the woman he would make his wife.'

'You have made the discovery too late, Doctor Holgate,' said Lydia Bolsover in her quietest, most self-possessed manner.

He looked at her inquiringly, not quite understanding her.

'How too late? We can remedy it yet. It is a great wrong to marry without love.'

'So they say. Well, she is lovely enough. I do not wonder her beauty made you forget your allegiance to me. She is like a queen.'

'What do you mean? Whom are you talking about?' Holgate asked hurriedly, with flushing face.

'About her—the woman from whom you parted at the Rectory Lane—the woman whom you love with your whole soul. Do not trouble to deny it. I saw it in your face.'

'Do you know who the lady was from whom I parted at the gate?'

'Oh yes, I know very well who she is. Mrs. Barham of Scaris Dene. He is very ill, they say,

and cannot live ; so that obstacle will be soon removed. Then she is your half-cousin, is she not ? one of your order ; a fitter mate for you than the Waveney schoolmistress. Oh yes, I understand it all quite well.'

' Lydia, as I live, she knows nothing about me ! She regards me simply as her husband's medical adviser. How dare you hint at such a thing ? You wrong the sweetest and best woman in the world !' he exclaimed in passionate indignation.

' I was once the best woman in the world to you ; and if you were married to her to-morrow, you would see some one else who realized what you call your ideal. That is your way. It would be no compliment to be your wife, Denis Holgate.'

' I shall never marry.'

' Yes, you will.'

She stood still in the shadow of a branching lime and looked him straight in the face. They were now out of sight of the Haven, and there was not a living creature but themselves on the quiet road.

' Am I to understand, then, that you wish to have nothing more to do with me, that you cancel all your promises and vows of a year ago ?' she asked calmly. ' You wish to be off with the old love before you are on with the new. Pray be honest. I like plain dealing. I am not one to say one thing and mean another. Try to imitate me in that for once.'

It was a humiliating position for a man. Undoubtedly she had the best of it ; and she looked as if she enjoyed her triumph. Her face was pale,

her lips firm, with a half smile upon them, her eyes gleaming stedfastly upon his face.

Denis Holgate did not know what to say or how to act. All womanhood was beautiful and sacred to him now for the sake of one. A great love had added a finer touch to his nature. He was anxious to do right, to atone, if he could, for what he had made this woman suffer. He could see that she was in pain now, for her brows were drawn; but she would have died rather than have admitted it in words.

‘God knows, Lydia, I will do what I can. I have been in the wrong. I am in your hands.’

‘I know you are,’ she said quietly. ‘Then let me speak. I have had something to bear in Waveney on your account. Mrs. Wagram and her set have not made my path one of roses lately. I have given up my situation for you. I have nothing in the world, no home, no friends. Aunt Cicely and her boor of a husband only tolerate me at the “Boot and Shoe.” I shall not stay there. Before I go I must have some understanding with you. You asked me last year to be your wife, and I consented. I have not released you from your promise, and I do not intend to do so.’

‘Very well, then, I shall marry you; but you understand that I do not care for you as a man cares for the woman he would make his wife.’

‘So you have been careful to tell me already,’ she said sharply. ‘There is no need to repeat it. I daresay we shall be as happy as the most of married people in this world.’

‘I shall do my duty,’ Holgate answered quietly

but coldly, and, turning, began to walk back towards the town. She had won, but victory was not sweet. Her heart was breaking with its agony of yearning, its passion of pain. Denis Holgate had not done well to awaken this wild, throbbing heart to the passionate life of love; it had been one of the gravest mistakes of his life. His heart sank as he walked by her side; the thought of passing his life with her was very dark. But he tried to beat down these sad thoughts, he tried even to think of her with something of the kindliness of long ago. But it was not easy; the struggle kept him silent as they walked along the dusty road together. She was silent too, walking with her eyes fixed on the ground.

‘I must go in and see Mrs. Frew again, I think. She is far spent. I will bid you good-night here, Lydia,’ he said quietly when they reached the gate of Woodbine Cottage. ‘I shall come down and see your aunt and uncle to-morrow. The sooner the matter is settled the better now.’

‘Very well,’ she said.

‘Will you shake hands with me, Lydia?’ She gave him a passive hand, which he clasped a moment, and then, bending forward, touched her brow with his lips. Instantly the hot colour swept over her face in a crimson wave.

‘Never do that again. I don’t wish you to make a hypocrite of yourself.’

‘Lydia, if there is to be even the semblance of goodwill or peace between us, you must meet me half way,’ he said sadly. ‘There was no hypocrisy in what I did. Are we not friends?’

The tears rose in her eyes. She was conquered. Her heart overflowed.

‘It is my pain to love you too well, Denis Holgate!’ she said, and turned sobbing from him. He could not follow her then for there were people in sight, so he entered the cottage gate with an aching heart. Life was beginning to be touched with bitter pain for Denis Holgate. The door was wide open to admit the pleasant air of the summer evening. Holgate tapped lightly at it, and then walked into the dining-room. The sight there touched him. The child Daisy walking to and fro the room crooning a low song to the baby she was hushing to sleep in her arms. Her little face had a slight red flush on it, her eyes were heavy and tired, her step slow and listless.

She smiled slightly, put her finger on her lip, and then laid the baby down, covering him up, ay, more carefully than his mother could have done. Then she stepped lightly across the room and stood by the doctor’s knee. She loved him, why she did not know.

‘Mamma has fallen asleep, and papa is in the study at his sermon,’ she whispered. ‘He is so tired! I wish I could make sermons for him.’

‘You would do everybody’s work, Daisy. Your heart is big enough,’ he answered absently, and stroked away the curls which shaded her earnest eyes. ‘I will not stay now then. Tell papa I shall come up a little later in the evening.’

‘I’ll come out with you to the gate; I want to tell you something,’ said the child, and, slipping her

slender hand in his, she led him out into the pleasant garden. 'As I was going down to Captain Silas's a little ago I saw the lady at the Rectory. She asked me to talk to her, and she kissed me too. Can you tell me why she is so sad?'

'She has many cares, Daisy. They weigh upon her heart.'

The child turned her eyes away to the soft blue line of the distant sea, and watched the golden shafts cast upon it by the setting sun. The mystery of life was sinking into her being; she had grown weary in her young childhood pondering upon the sorrows and the cares of those around her. Holgate felt the slight hand tremble in his own.

'What is it, Daisy?' he asked very gently.

'Papa says God knows all about us, and that He loves us very much. It must grieve Him that every one suffers. Have you cares too, Doctor Holgate?'

'Ay, child, bitter cares,' answered Holgate quickly. 'I have been very wrong and very wicked. I am trying, Daisy, to be a better man.'

'Oh, I do not think you can be that! Papa loves you very much; you are so kind to everybody. I love you, Doctor Holgate,' added the child shyly, looking up into his face.

'God bless you, Daisy! you are an angel in this place,' said Holgate, with emotion, and, bending down, he touched the pure brow with his lips, and then went his way.

Two hours later he was summoned in hot haste to Woodbine Cottage. He found the curate's wife

very ill, and slightly delirious. He saw at once that there was no hope. Gilbert Frew was sitting by the bedside in an attitude of hopeless despair. His sensitive nature was writhing keenly with unavailing remorse. He had never in his life uttered a harsh or reproachful word to his wife, but there had been times when he had felt weary and impatient of her careless housekeeping, her poor fulfilment of the duties of wife and mother. These thoughts now stabbed the curate to the heart like a two-edged sword. • If he had only been kinder, more helpful, more faithful, with her, he said to himself accusingly, he could have better borne to have her taken away.

Holgate laid his hand on his shoulder, and the curate turned his head and raised a haggard face to his.

‘Can you do nothing?’ he asked imploringly.

Holgate shook his head. His heart was wrung with the man’s anguish. Never had he felt so keenly how little he knew, how very slight was his boasted power. He stood helpless at the approach of death.

‘Are you there, Gilbert?’

‘Yes, Hetty, I am here,’ said the curate breathlessly, thankful for that brief gleam of recognition.

‘I am going to die, Gilbert, am I not?’

‘I fear, my darling, nothing more can be done,’ he answered in a whisper.

She closed her eyes a moment, her pale lips moved, then she opened them and fixed them on her husband’s face.

Holgate stepped lightly across the room and looked out of the window across the sea, where already the young moon had lit a silvered pathway.

‘I have been a poor wife to you, Gilbert. I wish I had been better. But you forgive me, do you not?’ asked the dying woman earnestly.

‘Oh, Henrietta, hush! There can be no question about that now. Do you forgive me, my wife?’

‘Forgive *you*? Don’t mock me, Gilbert. You have been too good, too kind, too forbearing. I was never fit to be your wife. But you will miss me a little, and the children will be a heavy care to you. Take care of Daisy, Gilbert. I have not been just to her, but you will make it up to her, and she will be a comfort to you, I know. How dark it grows! Has the sun set yet?’

‘Long since. You are not afraid to cross the dark river, Henrietta? You have faith in the Saviour?’

‘I—I think so. No, I am not afraid. I have asked to be forgiven. I should like to have lived a little longer, to try and be a better wife to you, a better mother to the children, but I am quite willing to go.’

Holgate opened the door of the adjoining dressing-room and slipped in. No stranger should listen to the last words between the husband and wife. She spoke no more. And within the hour the curate’s household was made motherless.



CHAPTER XIV.

A MOMENTOUS HOUR.

‘If you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and the true,
And the beauteous, and the right.’

BROWNING.

‘**M**Y master is asleep, sir,’ said the servant to Doctor Holgate, one evening when he called at the Rectory.

‘I will see Mrs. Barham, then, if you please.’

The girl hesitated a moment before she answered.

‘Step into the dining-room, sir, and I’ll tell her you are here.’

Holgate nodded, hung up his hat, and crossed the hall in the direction of the dining-room. As he did so, he noticed signs of confusion about, and some packed trunks standing in a recess. He turned to ask the maid whether they were leaving the house, but she had already disappeared through the baize-covered door into the kitchen. When he entered the dining-room, he saw Mrs. Barham

sitting at the davenport, writing. A candle was burning beside her, for though it was a summer evening a dense fog had come suddenly down, making twilight before the setting of the sun. She rose hurriedly, and only half-turned her head to greet him. He wondered at the evident confusion in her manner, usually so calm and self-possessed.

‘Good evening, Doctor Holgate. Excuse me just one moment, while I address this letter. Might I ask you to take it to the post as you go down? The maids are at their wits’ end. We leave Crosshaven to-morrow.’

Her voice was distinctly tremulous; she seemed much distressed.

‘Anything I can do, Mrs. Barham, will be gladly done,’ he answered sincerely; and sat down to wait until she should be disengaged. She seemed to linger over the writing of the address, and she sat with her back to him. But he could see the beautiful outline of her face, showing against the shadow cast by the candle-shade.

‘Mr. Barham has been very unwell to-day, Doctor Holgate,’ she said at length. She rose as she spoke, still toying with the letter. He saw her hand tremble as she put it in the envelope. He noticed another little thing, that she wore her hair low on her brow, as he had never seen her wear it before.

‘I am sorry to hear that. If he is worse, is it wise to hurry away from the Haven?’

‘Yes, it is imperative. He is asleep now. I do not think you will see him to-night.’

‘If not, I can look in early to-morrow. You will not leave in the morning?’

‘Yes, in the morning.’

‘Are you going to your own home?’

‘In the meantime, yes. I have just been writing to Lady Holgate.’

‘May I express the hope that there will be some rest for you at Scaris Dene, Mrs. Barham?’

She shook her head, and her mouth trembled.

‘I sometimes think there will be no rest for me this side the grave, Doctor Holgate. God alone knows why life is made so hard for me. I cannot bear it!’

The words seemed forced from her. She sat down at the desk again, and, leaning her head on her folded arms, gave way to a fit of passionate weeping. God knew what it was to Holgate to look on and keep silent. His heart was bursting with its agony of pain, of passionate and yearning love. Yet he dared not even lay a kind hand on her shoulder; he must be dumb, motionless, blind to her sorrow and her care. It was a moment of fearful trial for the man. He stood up; his hand shook; the colour died absolutely out of his face. But he kept silent. By a mighty effort he remained loyal to her, to himself, and to the woman whom he had promised to make his wife. The victory showed that Holgate’s struggles after a better life were not barren of results. They stood him good stead in this hour of agony. He stood in silence until the passion of her weeping was spent, and she rose and turned to him once more.

‘Will you forgive me? I can never forgive myself. I have had a trying day, and I have had no sleep for many nights. My nerves are unstrung. Pray forget it. It is nothing more than that.’

‘I only wish it were as easy to forget as it is to speak of it,’ returned the surgeon gloomily. ‘If I look in an hour or two later, I might find Mr. Barham awake.’

‘Do not come. It would be better that you did not see him again;’ and the red rose in her cheek. ‘He would only insult you, as he has insulted me to-day. I only hope that by to-morrow he may not have changed his mind. It is quite possible that he may refuse to go home after all. His whims have no end.’

‘It becomes a question how far it may be right to humour these whims, Mrs. Barham.’

A sad, slight smile touched for a moment Winifred Barham’s lips.

‘You do not know him, Doctor Holgate,’ and suddenly she drew herself up a little. ‘I forget myself sometimes in speaking of my husband, but I feel at home with you. You have been a kind, true friend to us, Doctor Holgate. God bless you for it!’

‘Oh, hush! It is nothing in comparison with what you have been to me. You have made me a better man, Mrs. Barham,’ cried Holgate, no longer able to restrain himself. ‘I dare not trust myself to speak of your angel patience, your utter abnegation of self. It has been like a revelation of God Himself to me. I say it reverently, and you will never know what you have done for me in this place.’

An exquisite light dawned on the face of Winifred Barham.

‘I thank you,’ she said simply; ‘I shall never forget what you have said. Now I must say good-bye, and send you away. May I say one thing more? I have heard a bit of gossip in the Haven. If it is true, may I pray God bless you, and the woman who is to be your wife, Doctor Holgate?’

It was proof of her own loyalty, of the greatness of her womanhood, that she could so speak. Holgate was humbled before her. He had not a word to say, only his heart beat with a hungry, passionate pain.

‘It is true,’ he answered, with his head bent. He felt as if he could not look her in the face.

There was a brief silence between them, and the candle burned low in its silver socket, until the light grew very faint in the room. A curious sense of nearness to each other possessed these two. Winifred Barham was conscious of it, without understanding it; Holgate, alas! understood it only too well. Never had life seemed so unbearably hard to him. He did not know why he lingered, prolonging the bitter pain of each moment.

‘Then if you go to-morrow, we may never meet again,’ he said quickly.

‘Oh, I should not like to think that. We may meet; I trust in happier circumstances,’ she said more brightly.

At that moment the up-stairs bell, with which Holgate was now familiar, rang furiously through

the house. He saw her start, and grow paler, if that were possible ; there was a distinct expression of fear on her face.

‘I must go. Good-night, Doctor Holgate,’ she said hurriedly. As she spoke, she passed her hand nervously across her brow. At that moment the candle, in an expiring effort, sent up a bright flame, and Holgate saw that in pushing the golden hair aside she had revealed a long blue mark like a bruise.

‘What is that ? Are you hurt, Mrs. Barham ?’ he asked, starting forward. ‘Have you met with any accident ?’

Her colour rose again, this time in a hot, quick, painful wave.

‘Do not ask. It is better not. The shame of it was harder than the pain. Forget it and me, Doctor Holgate. Again, thanks for all your goodness. The heart of a desolate woman has been cheered by your friendship.’

So saying, she glided from the room. Holgate, like a man in a dream, followed her, took his hat, and went out of the house.

He was possessed of a thousand impulses, which were like to overwhelm him. One was uppermost, a wild desire to be revenged on the coward who tyrannized over the weak woman the law had placed in his power. There had been times when intense pity for Guy Barham had made him find excuses for his irritability, his waywardness, the selfishness of his whims. But now pity was dead ; a blind indignation, a black and bitter hatred

possessed his whole being. That purple bruise on the white brow seemed to have burned itself into his very soul. He drew his hat over his brows ; he ground his teeth and clenched his hands. It was well that no one saw him in that wild mood. It is certain he could not have controlled himself sufficiently to present an unruffled exterior.

It had been a fine mild day, without brilliant sunshine, or the heat common to the month of July, but now a dense fog hung over sea and land like a pall. A low wind had risen, and drove the mist against Holgate ; he felt its cold, stinging touch in his face. Involuntarily he turned his steps towards the shore. He needed its isolation, its freedom ; he had a hard battle to fight. He gave himself up, as he went, to a vision of what life might have been had they met in happier circumstances, had both been free. He told himself bitterly it was mad, wrong to think of her at all ; but oh, such thoughts were passing sweet ! They were like a solace to an aching wound ; and they could harm no one. They had parted, probably to meet no more on earth. To-morrow he would be brave and strong to take up the grey routine of his life, made better, he hoped and prayed, by the sweet example which had been daily before him for months. Standing there on the sloping bank, where Captain Silas's 'owd boat' was rotting in wind and weather, quieter, holier, better thoughts came home to the heart of Denis Holgate. He watched the tide flowing in with stealthy rapidity ; he saw the gradual rising of the breakwater, and

heard the swell lapping the keels of the boats at anchor there ; he listened to the sea winds moaning within the impenetrable mist ; and felt as if he were a creature utterly alone in some remote region, far removed from the haunts of men. The village was lost in the fog ; he could only see a few yards before and behind him ; but the solitude, the sense of utter isolation, suited his mood. He had to bid farewell here, by the edge of the sobbing tide, to a part of his life which must henceforth be to him a dim but very sacred memory. This love, which had been at once the deepest joy and the keenest pain of his existence, must henceforth be shut absolutely out of his life. With folded arms and eyes downbent upon the sea-daisies blowing on the sward, Denis Holgate looked ahead a little into the life which a woman's influence was to make a nobler, manlier, heavenlier thing than it had ever yet been. For her dear sake, to be worthy of the friendship she had said was between them, he would do his duty henceforth, with God's help, unflinchingly, at whatever sacrifice or cost. First of all, then, self must be trampled upon, must be put absolutely in the background. Duty first of all pointed to his childhood's home, to his patient, heroic, self-denying mother, to his sister, whom, God help and forgive him ! he had once despised. Tears rose in his eyes as he thought of her ; a new tenderness crept into his heart, suffusing his whole being with a soft and radiant glow. To see them, to seek them out, to insist that they should share what he had, that they should permit him to atone for the

past, this must be his first step. That done, his next and harder duty concerned the woman whose love he had won, and whose happiness he had it in his power to make or mar. He had not been just to her, he told himself. He would be kinder, more generous, more tender with her. When she was his wife, perhaps, the love which beautifies marriage would grow up slowly, and on a sure foundation.

So Denis Holgate mapped out his life, looking its realities sternly in the face, making up his mind manfully to its manifold duties. There was a silent heroism in this, which had a touch of the sublime in it, because he was making a tremendous effort. He was still sitting on the old boat with his eyes downbent, when the sound of approaching hoofs caused him to raise his head. Then he saw Silas Rimmer's Jerry trotting along the path, with his ears back, his nostrils dilated, his shaggy coat dripping wet. The poor creature came up to his side, rubbed his wet nose against his sleeve, and exhibited signs of distress. Holgate smiled, and bade him get away home, but when he moved away the animal persistently followed him, exhibiting a strange uneasiness which struck Holgate. He walked right out upon the marshes, through the dense folds of the mists, until he reached the white edge of the tide. It was now almost full; only a narrow strip of sand remained dry. Jerry had left him, and was careering wildly about the sand-hills, as if a sudden terror had possessed him. As Holgate was about to retrace his steps, a sudden sound was borne to him on the wind, like the shrill cry of a

woman half muffled in the deadness of the mist. He strained eyes and ears an instant, until he heard it again, this time unmistakably a cry of agony and fear. He knew whence it came, from the sandbank where the cockle-gatherers had been busy in the afternoon. The shore was quite familiar to him now; he knew that the treacherous sandbank was not more than a hundred yards distant, but as there was now deep water in the breach, and the tide rising rapidly, certain death awaited any human being left upon it.

It took Holgate only one moment to make up his mind. He was not a coward; he could not allow a fellow-creature to die there without making an effort to lend a helping hand. He thought of running for a boat, but by that time, owing to the rapidity with which the tide was flowing, it might be too late. Casting off his coat and vest, he waded into the water, and was very soon beyond his depth. He was a strong swimmer, and the water was comparatively smooth; and with the cry, shrilly renewed, to guide him, he kept in the right direction. The fog was so dense that he felt himself in shallow water once more before he could see any one on the sandbank. At length the outline of a woman's figure became visible, and in a moment he was within a few yards of her, and saw to his utter amazement that it was Lydia Bolsover. The bank on which she stood had now become a few yards in circumference; ten minutes more and it would be submerged.

‘Denis! Denis! save me!’ she cried wildly, her

face in its agony of terror blanched like the face of the dead.

‘I shall try. I heard the cry, but did not dream it would be yours. Can you swim?’ he asked in a quiet, firm voice.

‘No, no! We shall be lost!’ she cried wildly. ‘Oh, that dreadful, cruel sea!’

‘Hush!’ he said sternly. ‘Listen to me. There is only one chance of safety. You must cling to me. I can swim, and I am strong, but everything depends on your keeping absolutely still. If you hamper me with any motion in the water, it is certain death for us both.’

She hesitated a moment. His calm, quiet manner gave her confidence. She saw that he had faith in himself. She also became perfectly calm.

‘I understand you. Tell me exactly what to do; I am ready.’

‘Come, then.’ He held out his hand. She cast one look at the fast-lessening islet on which she stood, shuddered, and stepped into the water.

It was a curious thing that on this night Denis Holgate should save the life of the woman who loved him, but whom he did not love. He smiled slightly as he breasted the wave with her on his arm. His progress was but slow; it was undoubtedly a time of fearful suspense and peril for them both. But shortly it was over, and they stood together safely on the shore, she very white and trembling, he exhausted with his toil.

‘Let us get home as quickly as possible,’ he said. ‘Are you able to walk?’

‘Yes ; but you ? I fear you are quite exhausted. Can I run for help ?’

‘No. Come, let us go home. Tell me how you came to be there and let the tide come in on you. Has no one ever warned you of these dangerous sandbanks ?’

‘No. I was sitting reading and watching the sun set. When it dropped into the sea, the fog came down just like a pall ; and when I got up to go home I found deep water all round me. I was sitting with my face seawards, so I did not notice the quick flow of the tide.’

‘There is one place where you could have stepped over. I suppose you could not find it in the mist.’

‘No ; besides I did not know. I hope Captain Silas and Mr. Frew’s little girl are safe. I saw them and the donkey far across the sands opposite Marshside.’

‘There is no fear of Captain Silas ; he knows these treacherous sands too well,’ said Denis Holgate. ‘I hope you will be none the worse for your adventure. If I am able I shall look in and see you to-night.’

She looked at him suddenly—gratefully, yet with wondering eyes.

‘Would you have swam to my rescue had you known it was I on the sandbank ?’ she asked.

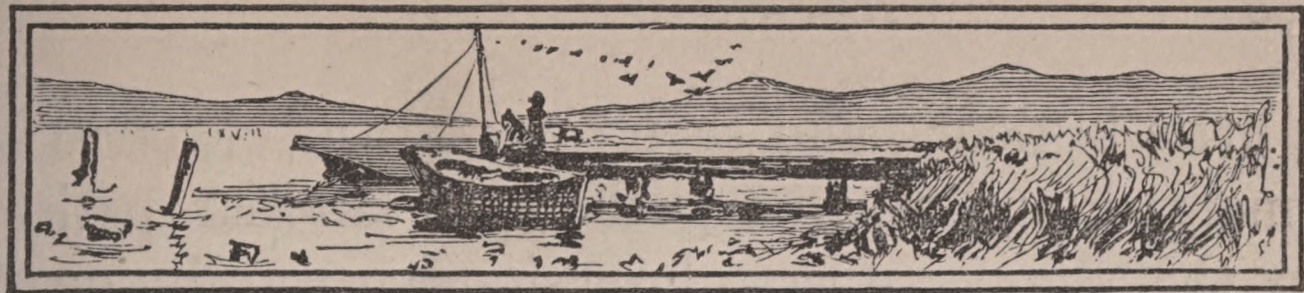
‘Most certainly, Lydia.’

‘You have saved my life. I thank you for it, Denis Holgate. I shall not forget it.’

‘Whose life would I save if not that of my promised wife, Lydia?’ he asked, with a smile.

She made no answer, but the tears rose in her eyes. They parted at Captain Silas’s cottage, remarking upon the open door, not knowing that nevermore would Captain Silas cross its threshold or smoke his pipe of peace within the trellised doorway—nevermore.





CHAPTER XV.

‘OF HIS KINGDOM.’

‘These birds of Paradise but long to flee
Back to their native mansions.’

Prophecy of Dante.

WHEN the baby, worn out with a fretful day, fell asleep in the evening, little Daisy had stolen away down to see her old friend, leaving her father in the study, and the boys playing in a more subdued way than usual in the back yard. Martha, softened by the sorrow which had come upon the house, and touched by Daisy’s pale face, willingly promised to nurse the baby should he awake, and bade her not hurry, if she would like a walk. Daisy would like to have told her father, but the study door had been locked since tea, so the child only slipped quietly across the hall, touched the door-handle with her lips, and stole out of the house.

No one met her on the road, but Cicely Sutton happened to observe her entering the door of Captain Silas’s cottage, and her tears had started at the thought of the care now weighing upon the shoulders of the solitary child. She had remained

a little in-doors, and then she and the old man had emerged, and taken together the familiar pathway to the shore. Jerry, browsing peacefully on the sand-hills, had trotted after them, and one of the cockle-gatherers had met them strolling slowly westward, hand in hand, talking in low, earnest tones. It is probable that, out of the sad event of the day, their talk had turned upon the mystery of death. That was just at sundown; immediately afterwards the blinding mists came down, suddenly and thickly, as if some unseen hand had let loose the folds of a heavy mantle upon the earth. Between eight and nine o'clock the curate came out of the study, to find the boys all in bed, and Martha sitting in the sitting-room watching the sleeping child.

‘Has Daisy gone to bed?’ he asked.

‘No, sir; she went out long since to see Captain Silas. She’s bidden a gradely whoile. Shall I goo an’ bring her whoam?’

‘Never mind; I shall go. Dear me, what a disagreeable night! What a fog! It was very wrong of Captain Silas to keep Daisy so long,’ said the curate, as he put a muffler about his throat and took down his overcoat from its peg.

He had opened the front door, and the wet, stinging night air blew chilly in upon him. It was very cold for a night in summer.

A few minutes’ sharp walking brought him to Silas Rimmer’s cottage, only to find it in total darkness. The door was open, but there was no

one within. A slight feeling of alarm came upon the curate; it was just possible, he thought, that in their walk they might have lost their way. That vague sense of uneasiness gave speed to his footsteps as he hurried up the street to the 'Boot and Shoe.' As he stepped into the porch he heard the sound of excited voices in the kitchen, and when he looked in he saw Cicely vigorously stirring something on the fire, and talking very loudly.

'I beg pardon, Mr. Frew,' she said, the moment she caught sight of him. 'Please coom in an' sit down, sir. It's a raw neet if ever theer wur won.'

Sutton took his pipe from his cheek and touched his forelock as he rose to offer 'th' parson' a chair.

'I won't sit down, thank you. I am in search of my little daughter, Cicely. She went out some hours ago, Martha says, to see Captain Silas, and she has not come back. The old man's cottage is dark and empty. I thought they might be here. Have you seen anything of them?'

Cicely Sutton gave a quick gasp, and caught her side with her hand. All the ruddy colour died out of her winsome face, and her mouth trembled.

'The Lord forbid!' she said in a shaking voice, — 'the Lord forbid! Oh, Mr. Frew, fur sure He'd nivver let nowt happen t' little lass!'

Gilbert Frew sank into a chair, now totally overcome. He did not know what he feared. Cicely could not bear to see him in that attitude of despair, with his face bent on his hands.

'Dunnot take on, sur; fur sure owd Cap'n Silas knaws ivvry fut of th' marshes an' th' shore fra

Hesketh to Formby. Mayhaps hoo's gon wi' him to Sou'port, an' they'll coom whoam by th' neet train.'

'It is the sandbanks, Cicely. I fear them,' said the curate, rising heavily to his feet.

'Ay; my niece Lyddy's had a taste of 'em to-neet. Hoo's coom' whoam drippin' fra th' sand-bank. Dr. 'Ow'git saved hoo's life to her. Theer wur deep watter atween her an' th' shore, an' he swam fur her, an' brought her whoam. Hoo's in bed noo, an' wonna git th' better o't fur lang. Hoo's gotten a foine fright, I can tell yo'. That wur loike a silly wench, Mister Frew; but catch Cap'n Silas goin' near th' banks an' a fog brewin'. He's han't forgot what they took fra him years agoo, parson. Art gooin' out, Sutton?'

'Ay, I'll jest tak' a walk alang th' sand-hills. Happen I'll see 'em,' answered Sutton, pulling on his boots. Cicely saw that her husband was not less anxious than herself.

'Yo'd better git Sammy Wright an' Jack Wright and Bob Linacre wi' yo', Sutton. One pair o' hands an't no use. Keep up thy heart, parson sur. Fur sure's the Lord 'ud look after the little lass. Whoile Sutton goos for th' men, wonnot yo' goo up to th' station? Th' train 'll be in soon, an' they may coom be it.'

'I'll go, Cicely, but I don't expect they will come. I am very anxious,' said Gilbert Frew wearily.

He was right. No passenger from Southport alighted at Crosshaven station that night, and he hurried back to the inn, thoroughly alarmed. He

found the men waiting for him, with anxiety and distress depicted on their faces. If anything had happened to little Miss Daisy, it would be even a worse grief to the parson than his wife's death. All night through the anxious group wandered about the marshes and the shore, but found no trace of Captain Silas or his little lass. One fear possessed them, and was indeed whispered among them out of the curate's hearing, that the ebb tide might carry the bodies out to sea, and that no trace might ever be found, or any clue to the mystery of their death. There was no doubt in their minds that the worst had happened to the old man and the little child. The dawn found them wandering disconsolately along the wide stretch of sand out from Marshside. It was a lovely dawn, clear, sweet, and bright, with a flush in the east like the bloom on a baby's cheek, and a promise fairer than could be imagined or described preceded the rising of the sun. They strained their anxious eyes across the expanse, but nothing was visible.

'Lyddy said she saw 'em gooin' on to Marshside,' said Sutton at length. 'Bob Linacre, wilt coom alang o' me an' see if theer be anything beyant yon sand-hill?'

His manner was a little excited, but they did not notice it. Gilbert Frew was like a man in a dream, passive, still, silent, following the others, but apparently taking no interest in the object of their search. He even wondered at times what they were doing wandering about here in the hush of the early morning, not realizing that they

were looking for his own lost child. It was agreed that while Sutton and Bob Linacre went eastward a little way, the others should wait where they were.

‘Theer’s summat yander, Bob, see, bi yon rock,’ said Sutton, grasping his companion’s arm when they were out of hearing. ‘Doesna it look oncom-mun loike a little gel’s frock? If it be, God help th’ parson! I wish I wur anywheer but wheer I am at this minit.’

‘We mun goo an’ see, I reckon,’ answered the other in a trembling voice; so in silence they strode across the wet sands until they came to the low flat rock left dry by the receding tide. And so they found them, the old man and the little child; she with her little arms clasped tightly about his neck and her head on his breast, her golden hair lying in wet tangles over his shoulder, both quite dead. They had loved each other in life, and together had entered that happy haven of which they had so often talked. There was no expression of terror or fear in their faces; both were peaceful and pleasant, the lips of little Daisy parted in a smile. The cruel sea which had hemmed them in and made them its prey had only given them a better inheritance than any earth could give, ‘for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

‘I can say now, “It is well.”’

It was the curate who spoke. Holgate and he were alone together in the sitting-room at Woodbine Cottage on the evening of the second day

after the calamity which had cast a gloom of mourning over the Haven.

He was standing by the mantel with his arm leaning on it, his head turned to his friend, who was pacing to and fro the narrow room, as if labouring under a strong agitation. He had risen from his bed, where he had lain since his adventure on the sandbank, to come up and see Gilbert Frew. They had been talking, not of the calamity alone, but of the general affairs of life, and had touched upon its mysteries and strange sorrows. Holgate was questioning, rebellious, incredulous of the sweetness of the Divine Will, the curate wholly trustful and at rest. The Lord had given to him the comfort he needed; the dark hour was past.

'You amaze me, Mr. Frew; to see you so calm, so cheerful, so like yourself, is the most wonderful thing I have ever known. It cannot be a delusion and a snare, this religion which so upholds you in trials which few other men could bear.'

'It is no delusion, I bless God!' answered the curate quietly. 'When He reveals Himself to you, you will understand it, not till then. I do not know what holds you back, my friend, from the full belief and joy? I often think you cannot be far from the Kingdom.'

'Far enough,' answered Holgate gloomily. 'You think too well of me. You do not know of what meanness, what ingratitude, what selfishness I have been guilty. If it is not too selfish, I should like to speak to you about myself, Mr. Frew; I need the advice, the help of such a friend as you.'

‘I shall be glad to listen,’ answered the curate, and sat down by the window, from which he could see the smiling blue line of the sea which had robbed him of his little child. Perhaps it was but natural that he should turn his back upon it with a slight quick shiver; the wound was very open yet. In the upper room the child still lay, covered with the choicest blossoms of the summer, awaiting the hour when they should carry her to the new-made grave under the shadow of the Rectory limes.

Holgate, still continuing his walk, began at the beginning his life - history, omitting nothing, glossing nothing over, not sparing himself. There was a fine hope for him in the curate’s heart as he listened. When a man can thus lay his faults and stumblings bare before the gaze of a friend, he has taken a step in the right way; his face, beyond a doubt, is setting towards the Kingdom.

‘Hearing all this, Gilbert Frew, will you still touch my hand in friendship?’ he said in conclusion. ‘Do you not hate and despise me?’

‘No, I love you.’

He rose and gripped him by the hand, and so they stood a moment looking into each other’s eyes.

‘Life is about to begin for you. You will make it very noble,’ said the curate warmly, and his face shone with his love and hope in his young friend. ‘If God out of His goodness permits you to make your reparation to your dear mother, to give your sister a sweeter life, you will be grateful for

His mercy, and show your gratitude in your life.’

‘I will, so help me God!’ said Denis Holgate, with the firm resolution of the man, and yet with the humility of a child. ‘Will you sit down while I tell you the rest; and this will relieve me yet more. I want to keep nothing from you. It was Winifred Barham who roused me first of all to a sense of my own abounding unworthiness. I loved her.’

‘I knew it. I do know it; but I was not afraid for you. God was watching over you. *She* is a noble, good woman, one of His saints, who praise and glorify Him in their lives.’

‘How you understand everything! I feared I could not explain to you just how I loved her. It was with a love which purified my whole being. You will believe me when I tell you that not an unworthy thought ever mingled with it. That night we parted, when I was alone out on those dreary marshes, I did think for a moment what life might have been for me had we met free, under happy circumstances. She did not know I had such a thought. She will never know now. We may never meet again; and I am going to marry another woman. The very memory of Winifred Barham will make me strive to the uttermost to make happy the woman who becomes my wife.’

‘I love you,’ repeated the curate again. It was an exquisite and beautiful thing in his nature that even in the midst of his own tribulations he could wean his thoughts away from self and take a heart

interest in the life and welfare of another. 'When will you go to London?' he asked after a moment's silence.

'The day after to-morrow,' Holgate answered; and there was a moment's silence, as both thought of the double burying which to-morrow would cast such a sad gloom over the Haven. Who would fill the empty places? There could be no second Captain Silas; no other little lass to entwine herself so closely about the people's hearts.

'It was a fearful thing,' said Holgate involuntarily. 'Something ought to be done. There should be some signal of warning in these dense fogs.'

'I think something will be done now. I intend to move in the matter. It has been spoken of before. At the time Captain Silas lost his wife there was some talk of erecting a fog-bell house, and again when the cockle-gatherers were lost some years ago. It is probable the matter will be taken up again. I shall try and push it to some practical end, though I shall not be a resident here.'

'Are you going away from Crosshaven, Mr. Frew?'

'Yes; as soon as I can get something to do in London I intend to go. I do not think I could stay here now. The place has lost its beauty for me. I could not look with the same eye now on yonder shining sea, Denis,' said the curate quickly. 'A fuller, more active, more engrossing life would be the best thing for me just now.'

'I understand; but what will Crosshaven be without you?'

'Oh, another, perhaps worthier, will be found. In writing to Mr. Ridgeway yesterday, to acquaint him with my double sorrow, I mentioned my intention and desire. It is probable he will come home to see how matters stand in the parish. It is a pity he cannot see his way to undertake at least a part of the work himself. We have no right to judge, Denis; but to me it is a mystery how a man in the prime of life should be content to dwell in ease as he does, frittering away the precious days among the frivolities of worldly fashions. It is a poor, barren, aimless life. Well, must you go now?'

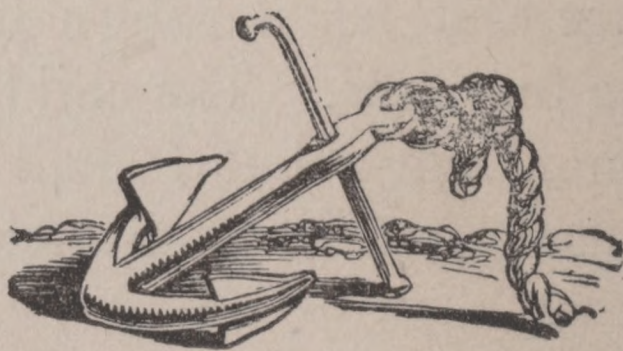
'Yes; it is growing dark, and I have some work waiting me,' answered Holgate, but still lingered, as if he had left something unsaid. 'Mr. Frew, may I go in for a little alone to see my little friend?' he asked at length hesitatingly and in a low voice.

'Assuredly. She is in the room where her mother died. You know the way. I shall not come up. Perhaps I have been there too long to-day. I found it hard to realize that my darling's living presence had really gone from me. The child was unspeakably dear to me, Denis; but I shall see her some day, and she is safe from these troubles. God's will be done.'

Holgate nodded, and slipped out of the room, with a full heart. He entered the upper chamber very softly, and, closing the door, stepped lightly to the side of the bed where the child lay asleep.

Her face was most natural and life-like, a sweet

repose dwelt upon it. As he looked, Holgate thought he would not have been startled had a breath from the lips stirred the petals of the white roses on her breast. A strange sense of solemnity, of nearness to something infinite and divine, came upon him by the side of the dead child. He knelt down, and, folding his hands, prayed that the sins of his unworthy past might be blotted out, and that help and strength might be given to go forward in the better way. He prayed that his heart might be made pure and humble, as the heart of the dead child had been, and that he might be made fit to meet her when the time came for him to lay down the burden of life. When he rose from his knees he kissed the sweet face, and, with a reverent and chastened spirit, went comforted upon his way.





CHAPTER XVI.

CHANGE.

‘Oh, it is sad to feel the heart-spring gone,
To watch Hope plume her soft bright wings for flight ;
Then is the world most drear.’

IT was a fine August evening when Denis Holgate threaded his way through the mazes of East London to his old home in the Tower Hamlets. The way was familiar, yet not familiar. He remembered it all, —the narrow streets, the continuous bustle, the close, impure air, the squalid women and children, the coster barrows, the discordant street cries. Yet it seemed years since he had lived among it all. Since then nothing had changed but himself. Something of the vague wonder, the deep compassion which had been wont to weigh upon Rhoda in her pondering upon the problem of East London life touched the spirit of Denis Holgate that summer night, as he slowly made his way from the railway station to Hanbury Lane. He had chosen to walk the whole way, perhaps to see about him, perhaps to try and calm the excitement which had taken hold of him at the near prospect of seeing

his mother and sister, of renewing his acquaintance with the old home. As he came nearer the river, it seemed to him that the air grew more difficult to breathe, that scenes of wretchedness, evidences of sin and misery, abounded yet more. His heart was filled with a vast compassion as he looked upon his fellow-creatures condemned to breathe perpetually this contaminated air, at the little children who had seen green fields and heard the murmur of the sea only in their dreams. Surely the place had grown more wretched than in the days when he had been wont to walk to and fro this very way, he told himself, but the next moment it came home to him that there was no change save in himself. Then his eyes had been holden so that he could not see, a selfish interest had wholly engrossed him; now the largeness of life had touched him, his heart had grown more tender, more sympathetic, he knew that there were other claims upon him than those advanced by self alone. A purifying influence had been at work upon him, and while he was a better he was beyond a doubt a sadder man. A higher knowledge, a wider sympathy had brought its own shadow with it. He saw the magnitude of the work which ought to be done, and felt himself weak, almost powerless to do anything to aid his brothers and sisters. As he walked that summer night through the narrow ways of the great city, a yearning desire to cast in his lot with those who lived their lives here came upon him. The Haven, with its quiet and lovely influences, had done its work; it had opened his heart, and now it could not hold

him. Here, in this place, where he had lived part of his life, he felt his life-work must be. It came upon him suddenly, almost like an inspiration from above. In an instant his duty was revealed to him. He felt glad and willing to take it up. It is a blessed thing, not only to be willing to do what is required of us, but to know exactly what that may be. There has been precious time and golden opportunity irrevocably lost through lack of this clear vision. I cannot but think, however, that, if we are in sober earnest, our calling will be revealed to us.

Holgate had not hurried on his way, and the sun had set when he turned into Hanbury Lane. He felt impelled to stand still a moment at the corner, though he was the object of close observation and curiosity. Here at least was no change. It seemed to him that the same wretched curs fought and scrambled among the dust-heaps, that the same tangled and dirty urchins made mud-pies in the gutter. The old tumble-down houses still leaned towards each other from their topmost storeys, the same rags and tatters were drying grimily from the window-poles. The gin-palaces, with their gaudy fronts and brilliant gaslights, still yawned a cruel invitation to their miserable frequenters to drown their care once more, the same degradation and squalor and poverty prevailed. Would he find no change, he asked himself, with a beating heart, in that one corner of Hanbury Lane which was dear to him, where of late his thoughts had so often been?

A curious feeling of hesitation, almost of reluctance, came upon him as he felt himself so near; but he strove to overcome it, and walked with quick, firm steps down the side pavement to the little shop. When he came nearer it, what did he see? There was a change here. The window, dirty and obscured, was filled with dusty second-hand articles, the door hung about like a wardrobe with old clothes. The sign read, 'Isaac Rathbone, Dealer in Second-hand Furniture and Clothing.' The master of the emporium, a greasy individual in shabby broadcloth and a velvet skull-cap, was smoking a cigar of doubtful brand at the door, and, seeing the well-dressed stranger eyeing his place with interest, stepped out to the pavement with a bland smile.

'Want a nice suit cheap, sir, or some real Queen Anne tables or a Louis XV. cabinet? Step in. Prices moderate. All bargains at the money and no deception. You pays your money an' you gets your article, them's my principles. Honesty is the best policy. Step in, step in.'

'I need nothing, sir,' answered Holgate, in a disturbed voice. 'But I will step in if you will allow me. Can you tell me anything about Mrs. Anne Holgate, who had this place of business as a provision shop a year or two ago?'

The dealer shook his head and rubbed his hands contemplatively together.

'I've been 'ere, sir, fifteen months, an' I rented the place from a man wot bought it for an eatin' 'ouse, but that spec didn't pay 'im. I axed no

questions about who was 'ere before 'im. It's dear at the money, sir, and times is hard. Won't you look at this 'ere clock? I swear, sir, it's a real French bronze. Came out of a haristocratic mansion near 'yde Park, 'pon honour it did, sir. Only five guineas, cheap at the money, a rare bargain. Won't you 'ave it? An ornament to any gentleman's residence, sir, an' sent 'ome free ov cost.'

Holgate shook his head. A keen disappointment had fallen upon him. He felt impatient of the man's volubility, and with a brief good evening left the shop. What was to be done now? He had never dreamed that they might have left the old place. How and where, then, was he to find any clue to their whereabouts? What did it mean? Could his mother be dead? If so, what had become of Rhoda? A sick dread took hold upon Denis Holgate as he asked himself these questions. Was this to be his punishment? Would no opportunity be given him to prove the sincerity of his repentance? Must he carry the sting of an unavailing remorse with him to the grave? He continued his walk through Hanbury Lane, looking about him anxiously, eagerly, hoping that something might catch his eye, the old sign, perhaps, above another door. Unless some strange circumstance had compelled her, why had his mother left Hanbury Lane? He had never heard her hint at any change, and she was too prudent a woman to relinquish an established business for any paltry reason. He stepped into a little coffee-house which

he knew had been there for twenty years. The woman who kept it might be expected to be aware of any important change in the Lane. She did not recognise him, though he saw but little change in her.

‘Could you tell me, please, anything about Mrs. Holgate, who kept the provision shop at the corner of Tom Beckett’s alley?’ he asked.

‘No, sir, nothin’ ’cept that they cleared out more’n two year ago. The old lady had made a bit o’ money, an’ ’twas thought she’d gone to live with her son, who was a doctor away in the country. But that was only spekkelation, sir, cos she were as close as a corked bottle, an’ nobody knowed for certain,’ answered the woman. ‘Maybe you’re a connection, sir?’

‘Yes. There was a daughter; you would not hear what became of her?’

‘She went wi’ her mother; an’ she were sore missed i’ the Lane, sir, were Rhoda ’Olgate. She were a friend to the poor. No, I know nothing of her; but she’s all right, an’ a-doin’ of good wherever she be, sir, or my name ain’t Sally Barker. Did you know the young man ’Olgate, sir?’

‘Yes. Then you think I need not make any inquiries in the Lane? No one will be able to give me any more information than yourself?’

‘I’m sure o’ it, sir. Mrs. ’Olgate took up wi’ nobody. It’s my belief that it were to keep Rhoda away from the folks i’ the Lane that she left. She were always pokin’ into folk’s houses, helpin’ ’em tidy up, an’ nursin’ sick babbies, an’ the like. She

were a rare good one, Rhoda 'Olgate ; but the old lady didn't like her ways. I've heard they didn't agree. I'm sorry, sir, I can't tell ye no more. You see it's a long time since they left. Deary me, what mayn't happen in two year ! We may all be dead an' buried, sir, in less time nor that.'

'Thank you, ma'am, for the trouble you have taken to answer my questions, and good evening to you,' said Denis Holgate, and, laying half-a-crown on the counter, he went out into the street.

He was utterly at a loss what to do ; the greatness of his disappointment incapacitated him from forming any plan of action. One thing alone was uppermost, that his remorse had come too late ; they were lost in the great wilderness of London, and he was alone on the face of the earth. He wandered aimlessly from one thoroughfare to another, not heeding what direction he took, not knowing what intention or desire possessed him. A vague unrest seemed to pursue him. He was a miserable man. Presently he heard the tones of a great bell pealing above the din, and knew he was near St. Paul's. The busy streets were lit by the glare from the shop windows, and the crowds hurried to and fro the footways with as much eagerness as if the business of the day had but newly begun. Denis Holgate felt curiously alone in the crowd. Since his arrival in the city five hours ago he had not looked upon a single familiar face save that of the woman in the coffee-shop in Hanbury Lane. He wondered vaguely, as he slowly threaded his way through the throng, how people

endured life here. He had changed since the days when London had been his home. The noise and bustle and hurrying to and fro jarred upon him; he thought longingly of the peacefulness and the beauty of that sweet village by the sea where he had received his baptism of pain.

He found himself in Fleet Street at length, and then the first idea shaped itself in his mind. Entering the office of the *Daily News*, he wrote an advertisement to be inserted in its columns next day. He would wait in the city, he told himself, for a day or two, and see what result his advertising would have; and if it elicited no reply, then he must return to the Haven and make arrangements for giving up his connection there. He could not remain; he could not take up again the sober threads of his quiet life; he could not dwell at ease in affluence and peace, not knowing what had been or might be the fate of the two women of whose welfare he had been so culpably careless.

Two women alone in a great city, perhaps without means of subsistence! Holgate shuddered at the thought. An agonized prayer was perpetually in his heart. He had sinned grievously in his neglect of a sacred duty, nevertheless he had a hope that God would not visit him with so dire a punishment.

These resolutions Holgate put into execution. He remained three days in London, and during the time was not idle. He inserted advertisements in all the leading morning and evening papers, worded

so that there could be no mistaking his meaning, but without result. Not a single answer was left at any of the offices, not the remotest clue gained as to the whereabouts of those he had lost.

On the fourth day he returned disconsolately, almost hopelessly, to Crosshaven.

Lydia Bolsover was aware of his visit and its object; he had told her honestly, thinking it her due, and the tribute had touched her. There was a change in Lydia since her narrow escape from death. Her aunt noticed it, and rejoiced in it, hoping it would continue.

When Holgate arrived at the Haven that night he went straight from the station to the 'Boot and Shoe.' Cicely was alone in the kitchen, stoning some fruit for to-morrow's pudding for dinner. It was a quiet time at the 'Boot and Shoe' in the early evening, before the idlers began to gather in their favourite resort to discuss the events of the day. Cicely had on a black gown and a bow of crape in her cap, a token of respect for those who within the last week had gone away for ever from the Haven. Her comely face wore a sad and troubled expression; no one knew indeed how the calamity had laid hold upon her heart. She had loved the old man and the little child with a deep and peculiar love, and the manner of their death she would never forget nor cease to grieve over. It was a thing she could not understand, though it was plain enough to others that the old man, not so keen-sighted nor quick-witted as of yore, had only lost his way in the fog.

She was brooding over it, recalling the child's sweet ways and the many fine traits in the old man's character, her tears dropping all the while, when a shadow fell athwart the sunshine which had been streaming in through the open door. She started nervously, and some of the fruit rolled to the red brick floor.

'Doctor 'Ow'git!' she exclaimed, with a slightly tremulous smile. 'Coom in, coom in. So yo's gotten back fra Lunnon? Sit doon. Fur sure yo're noan better fur thy trip. I nivver seed thee luk more white an' worrit. Noan trouble at whoam, I hope, sur?'

'Ay, trouble sure enough, Cicely,' answered the surgeon, dropping wearily into a chair. 'Are you all alone in the house? I want to see Lydia.'

'Hoo's i' th' garden pickin' th' blackberries for t' table, Doctor 'Ow'git. Hoo's been at it a' day; a gradely foine worker is Lyddy when hoo likes. Shall I call her in?'

'No. I shall go out presently. She is keeping better, I hope?'

'Oh yes, hoo's a' reet again, noan the worse fur her duckin', but a great deal the better. Hoo's a different lass. Theer's good in Lyddy, Doctor 'Ow'git. Poor lass, I donnot think hoo's hed a chance to be owt worth. Bolsover wurn't fit to bring up chillen, and Mary Anne, tho' hoo wur ma own sister, wur fur no use i' the world. You'll mebbe mak' a reet foine 'oman o' Lyddy, Doctor 'Ow'git.'

Holgate smiled slightly.

‘I may wish to take her away very soon, Cicely. I am going to leave the Haven immediately, and I intend to ask her to share my London life. There is no reason why we should wait.’

‘Noan i’ the world. I wish yo’ both well, Doctor ‘Ow’git. Nowt but good wishes ‘ll go wi’ thee fra th’ Haven. Thou’s been a good friend to ivvry wan. I know who’ll miss yo’ maist. Th’ Lord help our parson ! he’s a soar, soar tried mon,’ said the good soul, and her tears fell afresh.

‘He is ; but no man can say but that he bears his trials nobly, Cicely,’ said the surgeon, as he rose to his feet.

‘Goo out by th’ back door, Doctor ‘Ow’git,’ said Cicely. ‘Wilt tak’ a cup o’ tea fra me, if I mak’ it ready ‘gainst yo’ an’ Lyddy coomin’ in ?’

‘Oh no, thank you ; I only want to ask how she is, and then I must hurry home and render my account to Doctor Radcliffe. I outstayed my time a day.’

‘What a’tho’ ? Thou wert soar needin’ thy bit o’ rest, tho’ I donnot think thou’st had mich rest,’ said Cicely, shaking her head, and looking with a kindly eye into his face.

He was a great favourite with her, and she counted her niece a lucky girl, though there was something in their courting she did not understand.



CHAPTER XVII.

FAREWELL.

‘Estrange her once, it bodes not how,
By wrong, or silence, anything that tells
A change has come upon your tenderness,
And there is not a high thing out of heaven
Her pride o’ermastereth not.’

WILLIS.



AS Holgate stepped across the clean cool stone court at the back door and up the little flight of worn steps into the garden, he could not but think what a pleasant place it was that sultry summer afternoon, with its wealth of sweet old-fashioned flowers and its grassy walks made shady by the boughs of the apple-trees bending low with the rich promise of their harvest. The soft air was redolent of a thousand sweet odours and instinct with the melody of bird and bee. The ground sloped down to the edge of a running brook, and it was at the lower end that the blackberry and raspberry bushes grew thick and tall. In this little forest of green Holgate caught sight of a white gown and the flutter of a hat-ribbon, but he did not make haste to the girl's

side, nor did his heart beat nor his pulse quicken, as it ought at sight of her. He made his way leisurely along the shady path, and even stopped at a gaudy rose-bush to pick a bud for his button-hole. Turning round quite suddenly, she saw him bending over it, and the colour rushed all over her face and dyed even her finger-tips. But she was calm and colourless again when he came to her side, holding out his hand.

‘How are you, Lydia? I have just come by the afternoon train. I hope you are quite well again?’

‘Yes, thank you,’ she answered, and with her basket over her arm stepped out from the bushes. ‘How are you?’

It was a curious meeting, not like that of lovers certainly; they were courteous to each other, no more. Since that night at the gate of Woodbine Cottage, Holgate had not offered to kiss her, and she had noticed it, and perhaps regretted the hasty passion with which she had spoken then.

‘I hope you found your mother and sister well?’ she said in a low voice, swinging the basket on her arm as she spoke.

‘I have not found them at all,’ he answered gloomily. ‘Can you come and sit with me a little in the arbour, and I shall tell you about it?’

‘Yes.’

She turned and led the way along a little winding path to a rustic wooden bower built in the cool shelter of the high hawthorn hedge which separated the garden from the paddock.

She set her basket on the little table, and seated herself opposite Holgate. She was outwardly very calm and unconcerned, inwardly she was not so. Her interest in Denis Holgate was not a slight thing; he did not know what it had cost her.

‘They have gone away from the old place, leaving no clue,’ he said at once. ‘During my short stay in London I have done my utmost to discover them, but in vain. I cannot understand where they can have gone, or why they left the place at all.’

‘I am sorry to hear that. What will you do now?’

‘I am going to leave Crosshaven and go back to London.’

‘You have a good practice here, and it will be better by and by. It will all come into your hands some day,’ she said quietly.

‘That is nothing to me. I shall never know a moment’s peace of mind now, Lydia, till I find them and ask their forgiveness. I have wronged them both very deeply.’

‘You only obeyed your mother. She wished you, did she not, to sever yourself from them?’

‘Yes, but in that she was wrong.’

‘And what about St. Cyrus? I have never heard the name fall from your lips since I came to the Haven.’

A flush rose slowly to the surgeon’s brow.

‘I have not thought of it for months. When I look back and think what an idol I made of that dream, I marvel at my own folly. I do not think I

shall ever be any nearer St. Cyrus than I am now. If it should ever take any part in my life again, it will be time enough to deal with it when that day comes. In the meantime, I have other work to do.'

'You are very much changed, Denis Holgate,' said Lydia, leaning her arms on the rustic table and looking him straight in the face.

'In what way?'

'In all ways. I do not understand you. You seem to look at life from a different standpoint. You are very young to have buried your ambition as you have done.'

'My ambition is not buried, Lydia, only it has undergone a change. I have only learned of late that there is something more required of me than mere striving after self aggrandizement. With God's help, Lydia, I desire and intend to live a different life, and do what good I can in the world.'

'What has brought you to this state of mind?' she asked calmly and quietly, as a judge might question a prisoner at the bar.

Again his brow flushed, but he made answer clearly and honestly, without hesitation,—

'The grace of God.'

She rose, and, moving to the doorway, stood with her back to him looking out with a curious expression on her face.

'When do you intend leaving Crosshaven?' she asked after a moment, half turning her face to him.

'As soon as I can arrange matters with Doctor Radcliffe.'

‘Will you leave a certain position for a mere chance? Do you know of any opening in London?’

‘Not yet, but I expect to know what I am going to do before I go.’

There was another silence. He sat still. She, leaning against the ivied doorway, made a fair picture; her face wore a sweet expression, but her eyes were gravely troubled.

‘Will you go with me, Lydia?’ he asked suddenly.

‘No.’

She did not change her expression nor her attitude. Surely, he thought, the matter was not of much moment to her.

‘Why not? I expected you would. You are my promised wife.’

‘I was, but I shall not go, Denis, thank you,’ she answered quite gently.

He rose and took a step nearer to her. His heart went out to her as it had never yet done. He had never seen her so gentle, so sweet, so winning. Could this be the woman who had been so defiant and bitter that night on the Rectory road?

‘Will you not marry me, Lydia?’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘You know. I shall not tell you. I have changed too, Denis Holgate.’

‘Then you no longer care for me?’

She was silent, and watched with apparent indifference a swallow skimming lightly through the sunlit air.

‘I do not intend to marry you,’ she answered at length, but without looking at him.

‘I would be good to you, Lydia. I am in earnest. I think we would be happy,’ he pleaded, and his earnest look confirmed his word. He *was* in earnest, he had put away the memory of Winifred Barham out of his life, it would never come any more between him and this woman.

‘No ; we—at least I—should be miserable,’ she answered back, then she turned her eyes swiftly on his face, and there was a touch of passion in their depths. ‘There would be too many memories between us, Denis. Had I not seen you that day in the Rectory Lane with her, I might have been less scrupulous. You saved my life, and I am not ungrateful. You are free.’

‘But if I do not wish to be free, Lydia?’

‘Perhaps at this moment you do not, or think you do not. By to-morrow you would regret not having taken me at my word,’ she answered calmly. ‘I know you better than you know yourself.’

‘You are hard upon me, Lydia. I am not the impulsive, thoughtless being I was two years ago. I am a man now, and in earnest.’

‘And I am a woman, and in earnest too, Denis,’ she said, with a swift, tremulous smile. ‘I wish you well in your new life, and we part friends.’

She stretched out her hand for the basket, and the lace fell back from her wrist and revealed the white beautiful contour of her arm. Denis Holgate bent forward and touched her hand with his lips ere she could withdraw it.

‘I can only accept your decision, Lydia; but I am neither a happy nor a satisfied man.’

‘I know what is troubling you; it is the thought of me, not your own disappointment,’ she said quietly. ‘Do I look like a woman who would break her heart over a lost lover? I think you know I am made of different stuff, Denis.’

Holgate made no reply. His heart was troubled. He did not know what to say or do. Her self-possession now was very perfect, but he had other memories of her, and his self-reproach was very keen. He felt that he had been a blight on the clear sunshine of this woman’s life, and there seemed no opportunity for any atonement. She would have nothing to say to him and would accept nothing at his hands. He felt himself in a painful position; the folly of his thoughtless youth was causing him to reap a bitter harvest.

‘Don’t look so dolorous, Denis,’ she said kindly, and she touched his arm with her fingers. ‘I know what you are feeling, and it does not make me think less of you. Don’t fret about me. Your conscience may be quite at ease. You are willing to make me your wife, but I decline the honour. I am going to stay at home with Aunt Cicely. We are beginning to understand each other better. Some day you will hear of my marriage, perhaps, and will smile over our old folly, as I shall do when I hear of yours.’

There was a womanliness and dignity in her whole manner as she spoke, which touched Holgate

inexpressibly. She saw it in his face, and it was as if a sudden wavering shook her.

‘I must go in, Aunt Cicely will scold me,’ she said. ‘Will you join us at tea?’

‘No, thank you; I shall just go home through the paddock. Good-night, Lydia.’

‘Good-night. You will come and see us before you leave the Haven?’

‘If I can. Good-night. I despise myself, Lydia, and honour *you*.’

So saying, he passed through the wicket and strode across the paddock, but, instead of going straight home, went up the road to Woodbine Cottage. Perhaps the sight of the curate, busy in the neglected flower-beds, suggested the thought to him. Gilbert Frew saw him come, and had a smile and a warm word of welcome for him when he joined him in the garden.

‘What luck?’ he asked cheerily. ‘All’s well, I trust.’

‘No, it’s all wrong. There’s nothing right under the sun, Mr. Frew. I wish I were anybody but myself.’

‘That’s bad. Tell me about it. Shall we sit down? or can you talk while I tie up these poor beaten, broken things? I have taken heart again, you see, Denis, and the tide was at a very low ebb with me.’

‘Yes, but you have never lost your self-respect. I’m a poor mean wretch, conscious of my own insignificance,’ said Holgate gloomily. ‘I don’t know what can be the end and aim of my existence.’

The curate laughed as he deftly fastened up a trailing branch of jessamine to the low fence.

‘Go on, it’ll do you good, my friend; you are just on the toughest bit of the road. Rail away at the irony of fate.’

Holgate did not reply, and when the curate looked up inquiringly he saw that he was seriously troubled. Then his manner changed, and he became kind, anxious, deeply sympathetic as none could be so well.

‘Let us sit down here; the air is pleasant, is it not? I always think the open air gives one a freedom of thought and even a clearness of vision he has not in-doors. I think we shall unravel this, and out of our quiet talk arrive at a conclusion concerning life and its usage of you.’

Holgate sat down, not unwillingly, on the bench beside his friend. Before he spoke, a vision of the sweet child who had loved this little home stole upon him, and his eyes filled with tears.

‘A thought of your little daughter came to me, Mr. Frew,’ he said. ‘Her influence seems to hallow this place, her spirit to breathe in its very air. She was a blessed child.’

‘And is,’ said the curate dreamily, and with a smile of peace.

Meanwhile, Aunt Cicely, grown weary for her tea, was sitting on the settle enjoying it when Lydia came in alone. She looked up, and was struck by the girl’s exceeding paleness.

‘Wheer’s th’ doctor, Lyddy?’

‘He has gone away, Aunt Cicely,’ she answered,

as she set down her basket on the broad window-sill, and stood a moment with her back to her aunt, as if picking the stray leaves from among the fruit.

‘Art tired, my gel? thy face is white enow. I didna mean thee, Lyddy, to bide i’ th’ sun or thy head got bad,’ said Cicely kindly.

‘My head is all right,’ Lydia answered cheerfully. Then she came over to the table, and, leaning her hand on it, looked straight into her aunt’s kind face.

‘Aunt Cicely, it is all at end between Doctor Holgate and me. It is my doing; and if you’ll let me stay with you, I’ll try to be a help, and not a burden. Only, don’t, if you love me, ask me anything about it; because I—I don’t think I could speak about it.’

‘A’ reet, a’ reet. Sit tha doon, my gel, an’ hev thy tea,’ said Cicely cheerily. ‘I knaw it’s a bit soar; but yo’ll get used to it by and by, an’ maybe hev haue a dozen lads cwortin’ afore thy own mon coomes by. So donna fret; but tak’ thy tea. Theer’s nowt sets up a woman’s heart, an’ mak’s troubles loight, loike a cup o’ tea.’





CHAPTER XVIII.

IN DARK PLACES.

‘The pathos exquisite
Of lovely minds set in harsh forms.

GEORGE ELIOT.



RANNY, them people wot's come in upstairs are horful quiet, don't yer think?’

‘They've maybe got their livin's to make, like you an' me, Benjie, an' hain't got no time to mak' no noise,’ returned Granny, and, having threaded her needle, went on again with her button-holes with redoubled energy. ‘Are ye tired, Benjie?’

‘Oh no, not tired, only lazy,’ answered Benjie cheerfully. ‘But its a-gettin' dark, don't yer think? an' it's only five o'clock.’

A sigh followed the words, and a pair of large, hollow eyes were turned sadly upon the little narrow window, through which could be obtained a very meagre glimpse of the darkening October sky. That morsel of sky, changing with the seasons and with the weather, was a very precious thing to Benjie, the match-box maker; it was all he had of the outside world, all he knew or had

ever known of its beauties. He was a hunchback, one of those whom we speak of with pity as deformed. At the first glance, he appeared strange and even repulsive in appearance. His body seemed too large for the thin, stunted limbs, and there was an unsightly hump between the two shoulders. His hair hung in a rough tangle about his face, which was seared and wizened like that of an old man. The eyes were his one redeeming feature. They were large and lustrous, and had indescribable depths of pathos, even of tenderness in them. They gave an expression to that uncomely countenance, there were times when they even made it beautiful. The person whom he addressed as Granny was a withered old crone, whose age it was impossible to determine. In certain quarters in a great city age is not so much a question of time as of experience. Granny, then, might not be very old in years, her experience perhaps had left these marks upon her. Her face was a pleasant one to look at, in spite of its wan colour, its wrinkles, its infinite pathos. She had clear black eyes, which had a twinkle in them. In happy circumstances Granny would have been one of the happiest, most cheerful persons in the world. As it was, her good spirits only flagged when she was, as sometimes happened, in absolute want. But for these good spirits, a mixture of hope and faith and contentment, she had undoubtedly been in her grave long ago. Her present occupation was trouser finishing, that is, sewing on buttons, putting in linings, and other items, for which she received

the sum of twopence-halfpenny a pair, and found her own thread. In such conditions as these cheerfulness becomes a virtue of no ordinary kind. There was no relationship between her and the hunchback, though they shared their home, and he called her Granny. Benjie's mother, a drunken orange-seller, had fallen down a stair with him when he was a baby in arms. The fall had killed her and maimed him for life. Granny had taken charge of the child then, and till now; and they loved each other with a love which had few parallels in Straddler's Corner. Domestic affection was not a plant which flourished in that peculiar portion of the Queen's domain.

'I'll tell yer wot, Benjie my man, it's yer tea yer wantin', eh! isn't that it?' said Granny cheerfully. 'An' if ye jes' wait till I sew on four buttons, I'll make it. That's fivepence-halfpenny, Benjie, since five this morning, an' I'll finish another, perhaps two pairs, afore bed-time, an' that'll be a shillin'. Eh lad, if only I could get em regler, we'd be rich in no time, an' could save up to go on the river when the sunny days come.'

'I hain't done much to-day, Granny, not near a gross. It'll take me all my time to make twopence-halfpenny afore bed-time,' said the hunchback regretfully. 'Match-boxes don't pay, Granny, with the fire for dryin' em, an' the string to buy. I wish I could do summat else.'

'Don't 'ee fret, Benjie. Bless yer heart, you does as much as you can. An' the poor back has been bad to-day, I know. I wonder, now, could we

afford a red herring to-night, eh? Let me see, I have threepence left, but the coals is near done, an' there's the rent on Friday. No, we can't to-day. Well, well, we'll be content with our tea, eh, lad? It's a blessed thing to be content, even if it be little, an' we can't live for ever, that's one blessin'. Some day, Benjie, you an' me'll be lookin' down through that very bit o' sky you're so fond o' down on Traddler's Corner, and a-pityin' of the poor critters here, jes' as the angels are a-pityin' now o' you an' me.'

A smile very exquisite dawned on the hunchback's face, as his eyes were once more uplifted to the sky. As if to confirm Granny's words, a star, bright with promise, suddenly became visible in the tiny patch of blue.

'There, there's other twopence-ha'penny,' said Granny, with a kind of quiet triumph, as she folded up the trousers and laid them on the box beside the others. 'Now, we'll have our teas, Benjie, an' then we'll go on again, as busy as crickets, eh?'

'How cheerful you are to-day, Granny!' said the hunchback almost wonderingly, as he followed the old woman's active movements with his eye.

'Ay, lad; it's wot I heard last night at the Hall,' she said. 'Oh, Benjie, he was a fine gentleman, an' he knowed wot he was a-speakin' o'. I wish you'd 'a seen an' heard 'im. I said to myself when I saw 'im, that un 'ud do my Benjie good. He ad such a kind face, Benjie, an' he knowed, I tell ye, wot he was a-speakin' o'. He's had his own

troubles, an' he knows that it's only the Lord wot can do any good when there ain't no sun a-shinin'. You an' me knows that, eh, Benjie? Many's the time we'd 'a felt our hunger more but for knowin' the Lord knew all about it, an' had been hungry Hissself. It's the want o' knowin' the Lord that makes 'em so badly off 'ere in Traddler's Corner. But p'r'aps they'll all know Him some day, ay, p'r'aps they will.'

'I say, Granny, do you s'pose now the Lord knows I ain't made a gross o' boxes the day, an' that it's a-vexin' of me?' asked the hunchback.

'Why, in course He does. He knows everythink, an' He'll make it all right,' said Granny cheerfully, as she poked two very tiny morsels of stick in the grate to make the kettle boil. 'Why, there's somebody knockin' at our door. Who can it be? Come in, come in.'

In response to the invitation the door was opened, and a woman entered.

'Have you no light?' she asked, with a touch of imperiousness in her clear voice.

'We have a candle, ma'am, but we was a-savin' o' it for our work, as we were jes' goin' to hev' tea,' Granny answered rather perplexedly, for she could not understand this unceremonious intrusion, and rather resented it, thinking it was some undesirable neighbour. Granny rather held herself aloof from the dwellers in Straddler's Corner, although she would do any one of them a good turn if she had it in her power.

'Light it, if you please, and I shall give you

another in its place,' she said coolly. 'I want to talk a little with you.'

Granny lit the candle, and then turned to look at their visitant. The hunchback also turned his large penetrating eyes full on her face, and seemed fascinated by it. It was certainly a fine face, nay, more, the face of a strikingly beautiful woman. Each feature was perfect; the mouth, in spite of a sternness and grave firmness, had an exquisite sweetness, the eyes were as clear and limpid as a summer sky. Her figure, though not tall, was well developed, and carried with unmistakeable grace. Her hair was red gold, and seemed to be confined with difficulty, its natural tendency being to hang in waves about her shoulders. It strayed now from beneath the close Quaker like bonnet, and lay in tiny ripples on her broad white brow. Her dress was severely plain, and she wore no gloves; in her white, well-shaped hand she carried a note-book and a pencil.

'May I sit down?' she asked quietly. 'I wish to ask a few questions concerning your way of life. Not out of mere idle curiosity. I have an end in view. I wish to better the condition of such as you.'

'Are you a Biblewoman, ma'am?' asked Granny, as she dusted a chair for her strange visitor.

'No, no, nothing of that kind,' said she impatiently. 'I am a poor woman like yourself. I will not listen to a tale of your distress and give you a tract to satisfy your hunger.'

The scorn with which she spoke was very

marked, but the hunchback did not like to see her lip curl as it did at that moment. He was looking at her perplexedly, as if trying to make her out. She looked so young, and yet seemed to have had a hard experience of life too, else she had not learned to knit her brows so grimly. She had the look of one constantly at war with something; there was no repose about her, though she was perfectly self-possessed.

‘I belong to a Society whose aim it is to try and better the condition of the poor, and to wrest justice from the rich, who are their slave-drivers. We only ask justice, and we shall get it too. We are collecting facts concerning life in such places as this. I have told you this frankly, because you seem intelligent, and would resent any questions asked out of idle curiosity. This poor lad, I see, earns his living, if such it can be called, by making match-boxes.’

As she spoke she turned her magnificent eyes full upon the face of the hunchback. It was evident that her feelings were keen, her compassion quick and true, for her tears started.

‘Yes, ma’am,’ he answered simply. ‘I’ve jes’ been sayin’ to Granny that it doesn’t pay. You see we only get twopence-ha’penny a gross for ’em, an’, work as hard as I can, I can’t make more’n two gross a day, an’ we find the fire an’ the string.’

‘Twopence-halfpenny a gross,’ repeated the visitor, making an entry in her note-book. ‘No, my lad, it doesn’t pay. And what do you do, Granny? Do you make these trousers.’

‘No, ma’am, I’m a finisher,’ answered Granny, a little guardedly.

‘Tell me what you do to them and what they pay you.’

‘I hope you won’t say as I’ve been makin’ any complaints, ma’am, becos they’d pay me off, an’ work’s that hard to get. I’ve been lucky hevin’ ’em pretty reg’lar from the same place for a month back.’

‘No, no, that is the very last thing I would do,’ said the stranger quickly. ‘I assure you that if we cannot do you any good we will at least not do you any harm.’

Thus reassured, Granny stated her miserable remuneration, but not in a grumbling tone, though she admitted it was not enough.

‘The times is hard, ma’am, the master says—but it’s allus hard times with us, an’ we’ve got kinder used to it; ain’t we, Benjie?’

‘Ay, Granny; but we’ve allus the one sure comfort left,’ said the hunchback, and his large, melancholy eyes dwelt on the stranger’s face.

‘What is that? I am glad to hear you have some comfort. One would not think it,’ she added, glancing expressively round the poor little room.

‘We know the Lord knows all about us, an’ we’ve that bit o’ His sky to look at. He looks down on us o’ nights from there; doesn’t He, Granny? We feel Him quite near sometimes.’

‘I should have thought the Lord wouldn’t trouble Straddler’s Corner much,’ said the lady, with a quiet scorn. ‘The rich have Him as well as other things,

poor folk haven't. The Lord likes those that can pay up, that's about it. He won't give much for nothing.'

'Oh, ma'am, what a way to speak!' cried the hunchback in dismay. 'Why, He gives us everything: the light and the sunshine, and the birds and all, and He made us all, every one.'

'If He made us, why doesn't He provide for us?' asked the stranger sharply. 'Were you born as you are now?'

'No, ma'am; it was the result of an accident.'

'Why did He let that accident happen? If you had been an able-bodied man you might have been independent, instead of needy and helpless, as you are. It is impossible you can be content as you are.'

'Sometimes I am, ma'am,' said the hunchback eagerly, for she had touched a tender point; she had assailed the faith which was the beacon-light on his stormy sea of life. 'Mostly I am, Granny'll tell you. The only thing I fret about is not bein' able to go to the Hall in Mile End Road wi' her on Sunday nights. It's grand there, Granny says so.'

'What do they give you there?' she asked, with yet a swifter scorn. 'Do they offer to help you out of your slough of destitution? Would they give you a sixpence to buy a loaf of bread with, these Christians? No, I think not. They make you sing and pray, and tell you to thank God for your lot, because He has ordained that there shall be rich and poor on the face of the earth. Isn't that the

stuff they feed you with at Charrington's? I know the set.'

Granny rose from her chair, and drew herself up with a dignity which gave even her poor shrunken figure a touch of dignity. Her black eyes shone, her mouth trembled with a righteous anger.

'I don't know wot yer want, ma'am, nor wot yer means to do, but me an' Benjie don't want nothin' to do with ye, so please to go away. Me an' Benjie's knowed the Lord a longer time than we've knowed you, and it'll need to be harder times wi' us afore we gives 'im up. So good day to ye, ma'am, an' a better heart. Ye are worse off than us.'

'Very well. Of course if you have no desire to better yourselves you must just grovel in your misery,' said the lady sharply, and, gathering her skirts about her, she turned to go. Yet she hesitated and kept her eyes fixed on the old arm-chair where the hunchback sat, as if some magnet drew her to the spot.

'Wot is it, ma'am?' asked Benjie softly, and with a smile, for he saw the kindness in her look; there was something about her which won his heart.

'Do you suffer much?' she asked, with a gentleness which sat exquisitely upon her. Her face, softened by the earnestness of her pity, seemed to Benjie like the face of an angel.

'Not much, only sometimes, ma'am,' he answered. 'Won't you come back an' see me again? I think I'd like you to, if Granny 'ud let ye, an' we needn't

‘speak of the missions or them things unless you like.’

It was a shrewd, world-wise speech, but Benjie was old beyond his years.

‘No, Benjie,’ said Granny firmly. ‘Not in ’ere while I’m in it, if ye please. She ain’t up to no good, my man—she ain’t up to no good.’

‘If you wish it I shall come, Benjie,’ said the stranger, with her hand on the door.

At that moment there was a low knock, and it was opened from without.

‘May I come in?’ asked the deep, pleasant tones of a man’s voice, and a gentleman in the attire of a clergyman entered. He took off his hat as he crossed the threshold, but it was a moment or two before his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light and he could discern the occupants of the room.

‘Oh, Benjie, Benjie, it’s the gen’l’mán wot was a-speakin’ last night at the Hall!’ cried Granny joyfully. ‘Come in, sir, to be sure, an’ proud an’ glad we are to see ye, sir. Yes, indeed, we are.’

The clergyman hesitated a moment, looking doubtfully at the face of the other visitor, who seemed waiting to pass out. He was struck by her exceeding beauty, but she had hardened her expression, her lips were curled in scorn, she drew her skirts yet more closely about her, as if she feared contamination from his touch.

‘I hope I have not disturbed your visit, madam,’ he said courteously, and with a gleam of that rare

smile it was impossible to resist. 'My name is Frew. I am the new incumbent of St. Saviour's in Mile End Road.'

The stranger made no reply, but with lips closely compressed and head held in air, passed out of the room and down-stairs into the noisy street.

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CHAPTER XIX

DAWN.

'Twas better youth
Should strive through acts uncouth
Toward making, than repose on aught found made.'

BROWNING.

'**Y**OU are out of sorts, Denis.'

'Yes, I am well-nigh sick of my life.
I sometimes wish I had stayed in Cross-
haven, Gilbert.'

The two friends, more closely united than ever, were pacing slowly arm in arm along Mile End Road, near the Assembly Hall. It was a wet night, but the traffic in the streets had suffered no abatement; the pair were jostled and interrupted frequently as they walked; there is no hour of the day or night when the footways of East London can be said to be deserted.

'Tell me what is troubling you most, Denis.'

'Among so much I could hardly specify. To begin, then, Doctor Parsons is a sordid money-grubber, without soul or conscience. He would grind the last farthing out of the miserable wretches among whom he labours, and he expects me to be

the same. He knew what he was doing when he bound me to him for three years. I am toiled night and day, Gilbert, for my paltry hundred a year. The post of assistant to an East End practitioner is no joke.'

'You did not expect it to be a joke,' said the curate, with a quiet smile.

'No, but I expected to have time and opportunity to do a little good. As it is, I am hard put to it to get through what is expected of me. If an opportunity presents itself to speak a word or do a kind deed, I have not the desire to do it; that is what troubles me most. I am just sinking back into the old selfish slough. It does seem hard that a fellow anxious to do well should be so hardly kept down.'

'It must have its use, Denis, else it would not be,' returned the curate quietly.

'Then I have never obtained the slightest clue,' continued Holgate gloomily. 'It is nearly six months since I came to London, and in such meagre leisure as I have had I have not been idle. I have come to the conclusion that they are both dead. I wish I were done with life too.'

'Why, Denis, you talk like a crossed child, instead of like a strong young man with life before you. I know, my friend, that in your experience there have been things hard to understand. One day you will stand in a clearer light, and see the wherefore of it all. I know it who have had my share of disappointment and heart-sickness.'

'If it were not for you, Gilbert, I don't know

where I should be or what would become of me,' said Holgate, with earnestness. 'I am thankful I have met you to-day, because I have something to tell you. I saw Winifred Barham to-day.'

'Indeed! Not here?'

'No, in Oxford Street, in a carriage beside Lady Holgate. She had a widow's bonnet on, Gilbert.'

The curate was silent, and a few steps brought them to the doors of the great Assembly Hall, where the people were crowding in to the evening service.

'I must look in presently and see if they need me. Sometimes they are short of speakers, and it is a stormy night,' said he then. 'Have you anything to do to-night?'

'Yes, I am on my way to see a patient in Slack Row,' said Holgate.

'I will take a few more steps with you then. Will you describe your sister to me, Denis, if you please?'

'I am not sure that I can give you a very definite description of her. She was only an unformed girl when I saw her last. She had blue eyes and auburn hair, and a pale, colourless face. There was no resemblance between us.'

'She was not a beautiful girl, then?'

'Oh no, quite the reverse,' answered Holgate quickly, as a memory of his sister rose up before him.

'You do not think it likely that she would develop into a beautiful woman?'

'I don't think so. Why do you ask?'

‘For no particular reason ; I am keeping my eyes about me, that is all,’ returned the curate. ‘So you are finding city life short of your expectations ? You think it hard that, after giving up so much,—for you had a pleasant way of life at the dear Haven,—you should have so little worth the having here. Keep up your heart, Denis. Do your best. It will all come in His good time.’

‘I don’t doubt it. But it is a fearful thing for a man to live in the midst of this and to be powerless to help.’

‘Not quite powerless,’ said the curate, with a smile. ‘I hear of you sometimes in unlikely corners. I have learned to love my friend more in London than I did in Crosshaven, and he was very dear to me there.’

In spite of himself the surgeon smiled. There was a buoyant and sunny heartfulness about Gilbert Frew which was wholly irresistible. Under his touch mountains of trouble seemed to dissolve like snow before the noonday sun.

‘Some day, when you have time, I want you to come with me to see two friends of mine, who have taught me many a sweet lesson. There are living examples of the Lord’s love and mercy in the dark places of the earth, Denis. It is such, I do not doubt, that stay the judgment. Do you know Straddler’s Corner ?’

‘By reputation only. Parsons has no patients there, I suppose because there would be little chance of a fee. Who are your friends ?’

‘I would rather tell you nothing about them.’

Any time you have a leisure hour come for me, and we shall visit Straddler's Corner. I must go back now. That is eight ringing. Good-night. When are you coming to see us? The boys are often asking for you.'

'I shall come soon. You have made no comment on what I told you, Gilbert.'

'What could I say, that you do not know? My wishes for your happiness are those of a friend, Denis. Nothing that is for our good is withheld from us. Good-night.'

'Good-night, Gilbert. God bless you! You have been the salvation of me oftener than you think. But for you, I should have made shipwreck of my life,—you, and Daisy, and she,' said the surgeon, with emotion, and with an earnest handclasp well once more comforted upon his dreary way.

Denis Holgate was undergoing a hard discipline. Life was absolutely without sweetness, except such as he could extract from the hard duties of his profession. Even these he could scarce do justice to, being under the supervision of a hard, grasping, small-souled man, who regarded his calling simply as a means of livelihood, and looked upon his patients from a purely mercenary point of view. Doctor Parsons gave no advice gratis, nor had any hour for free consultation. Holgate could not have fallen into worse hands; there was absolutely no community of thought or sympathy between them. In London, then, Holgate's lines had not fallen in pleasant places. Gilbert Frew, out of his true and earnest love, was watching him closely and with

unspeakable yearning and anxiety. He saw the slow developing of a fine character, and even with trembling blessed God for it. He felt certain that it was but the needful discipline and preparation for a nobler life of consecrated service. He had an absolute trust in God's dealing with this wayward soul, and foresaw glorious results. Meantime his own work in his new sphere was unspeakably precious to him. His heart was perpetually riven with the appalling magnitude of the sin and misery around him, but he was by nature hopeful ; and even a promise of success where one desolate soul was concerned sent him singing on his way. Beyond a doubt Gilbert Frew had found his sphere ; his home life had its own deep pathos, four motherless boys, who clung to him for care and guidance in all things, their very helplessness giving new strength and a yet more tender touch to his fatherly love. There were times, however, when Gilbert Frew felt terribly alone, when the lack of a woman's gentle presence in his home was most bitterly felt. He could be much, yet scarcely all to his boys. He saw that they too missed a mother's care. He did his best for them, and left the rest with God.

When Holgate left him he went back to the Hall, but found that his services were not required. His allusion to his friends at Straddler's Corner had reminded him that he had not seen them for a week ; so he quickened his pace, and threaded his way through the labyrinth to that unsavoury place of habitation. There was no light in the rickety

stair, but, the way being now tolerably familiar to him, he groped through the darkness to the second floor where Granny lived. Just as he was about to knock, the low, steady tones of a voice arrested him. Some one within was reading aloud, a woman evidently, by the low, gentle, musical sound. It was not Granny's voice; she, poor soul, had no time to read, either to herself or to her charge. Each minute of every hour represented so much food and fire and shelter.

He knocked gently, and then opened the door. He felt no surprise at sight of the figure on the low stool by the hunchback's chair. The little table was placed in front of Benjie, who was busy with his match-box making, while Granny was bending low over her monotonous needlework at the other side. A solitary candle flickered in the centre of the table, its uncertain light fell full on the golden head of the reader as she bent over her book. Her bonnet was lying on her lap, her cloak unfastened and thrown back, revealing the beauty of her full white throat.

They had not heard his knock, nor his gentle opening of the door, so that he stood a moment looking and listening unobserved. She was reading the tenth chapter of Matthew. The manner of her reading and the expression of her face caused the curate to think she was performing a task. It was a task, however, which seemed to give exquisite pleasure to her hearers; both were intensely interested, and a sweet smile played about the hunchback's mouth as his wasted fingers deftly did

their work. A lame sparrow, Benjie's pet, had gone to roost on the narrow mantel-shelf with his little brown head under his wing. The curate noted even that in the few seconds he stood within the doorway, and he could not but think what a picture was the interior of that poor little home. Perhaps his interest centred in the reader; he had met her several times at Straddler's Corner and in other poor places, and was quite at a loss to divine who she could be or what her object. He had not even learned her name. Presently Granny, reaching over for her thread, started and gave an exclamation at sight of the curate.

'Oh, bless me, sir, come in! It's Mr. Frew, Benjie. Don't stop, ma'am. It's only Mr. Frew, wot you've met 'ere so often.'

'I fear I am interrupting a pleasant and profitable hour,' said the curate pleasantly, as he advanced into the room. 'Do not let me disturb you, madam. I shall go presently. I only came to ask for our friends.'

'It is no interruption,' she said coldly, and rising she closed the book and laid it on the table. 'I shall go now. Perhaps you will kindly finish my task. It will suit you perhaps better than it has suited me.'

She gave a slight mirthless laugh as she fastened her cloak about her throat. Gilbert Frew was at a loss what to say. He saw the hunchback's beautiful eyes dwelling on her face with unspeakable yearning, which seemed to have a touch of compassion in it. He also saw that she was careful not to meet that look.

‘Like yourself, I merely looked in to see our friends, and they would have me to read to them from this book. And if it pleases them, and they imagine it has a message of comfort for them, why not?’

She spoke rapidly, and with a slight defiance in her tone.

‘Imagination has not much to do with it, I fancy. There is very real and solid comfort within these pages, eh, Benjie?’ said the curate, laying his hand on the lad’s shoulder.

‘Ay, sir; that’s wot I tell ’er. She doesn’t see nor b’lieve it yet, but she will some day, sir; she will some day, cos I’ve axed God to let ’er see an’ b’lieve,’ cried the hunchback, with great earnestness. ‘She’s the best in the world, sir, only fur that; ax Granny, she thinks the same as me.’

The stranger, tying her bonnet-strings with a hand which trembled, lifted her eyes to the curate’s face. They had no smile in their depths, though a shadow of amusement slightly parted her lips.

‘It has a strong hold upon them, sir. If people would have as great a faith in each other as they have in an unseen and unknown deity, there would be less misery in this sad world. I could almost say that there would be no such place in London as Straddler’s Corner. It is a disgrace to us as a nation. The dwellings in which so many thousands of our fellow-beings live are a curse upon us, as we shall see when it is too late. And we are a Christian nation, making a boast of the example we set to the world at large. To you and me, who

know a little of this terrible London, it is an exquisite satire. You know it, though it is part of your creed not to admit it.'

Her passion rose as she spoke, the colour flashed into her pale cheek, one slight hand was clenched. Beyond a doubt she felt most keenly what she said.

'You are young, madam, very young, to have the weight of such questions lying so heavily upon you,' said the curate gently, his kind eyes fixed on her face.

'I am not old as years go, but I have lived here in East London all my life. Thought over the way the poor live seemed to be born with me. I cannot remember the time when I did not think of it by day and dream of it by night. And every day I live the burden grows, the weight lies heavier on my heart. There is a fearful injustice to be righted, sir; the cry of the outcast and the oppressed has too long risen in vain to a merciless Heaven. The time has come for them to seek justice for themselves, to stand at bay before those whose greed and selfishness and cruelty have ground them into the very dust. Here in this very room there are wrongs which it is impossible to know of and keep silence.'

'We're afraid of 'er, Granny and me, when she speaks like that, sir,' whispered the hunchback, just as if she had not been present to be affected by his words. 'She ain't often like that now, sir; and oh, she is gentle an' good an' kind! You couldn't help lovin' 'er so if you knowed 'er like Granny an' me knows 'er.'

‘Afraid of me, are you, Benjie?’ she said, smiling upon him with unutterable sweetness. ‘You know well, my lad, I wouldn’t hurt a hair of your head. Good-night, Granny; good-night, sir,’ she added, acknowledging the curate by a slight and distant bow.

He took a step forward. He was intensely interested in this young girl—she was in reality no more; he must learn something of her. Surely no ordinary experience had so hardened a nature which, without doubt, had a finer, sweeter side. Her kindness, her compassion, her fellowship with Granny and her charge were undeniable proof that her womanhood was a pure and noble and lovable thing.

‘If you will permit me, madam, I shall walk with you,’ he said. ‘It is dark and growing late. Are you never afraid to be abroad in these unsafe thoroughfares alone and unprotected?’

‘I? Oh no, they know me. They would not hurt a hair of my head,’ she answered calmly. ‘I shall not trouble you, sir. Your visit is to our friends.’

‘If you please, I will escort you,’ he repeated. ‘I can come again to-morrow and see our friends. I am sure they will not mind. I should like to have some talk with you.’

‘As you please,’ she said indifferently, and without further remark turned to leave the room.

The curate allowed her to go, knowing he could easily overtake her.

‘What is the lady’s name, Granny?’ he asked, when she was out of hearing.

‘We donno, sir, no more ’n ye know yerself. She comes an’ goes often here, an’ seems to hev a mighty fancy for Benjie an’ the sparrow. She doesna take much notice o’ me, though she guv me a warm shawl for Sundays, sir, bless ’er, she did!’ returned Granny. ‘She sits talkin’ an’ talkin’ to Benjie ’ere about the poor folk, and wot the Society, as she calls it, are goin’ to do fur ’em. I don’t rightly understand wot it all means, neither does Benjie; but she has a good heart, sir, on’y she doesna believe in our Bible an’ never goes to church. If on’y she’d go to the Hall, sir, some evenin’, it might do ’er good.’

‘And she has never told you her name?’

‘No, nor nothin’ about ’erself, an’ she ain’t one as ye can ask. She has a pride, sir, an’ a high way wi’ ’er; but she’s kind, kind to Benjie, an’ likes to talk to ’im.’

‘Strange,’ said the curate musingly. ‘I shall not stay to-night, then, Granny. Perhaps I may have some talk with her and learn something about her. Good-night.’





CHAPTER XX.

A YEARNING HEART.

‘She seemed not great, nor good,
A soldier with her banner half unfurled,
A pure, high nature, half misunderstood.’

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IT still rained, and a dreary fog had closed over the city. It was one of the chilliest and most dismal of November nights.

Gilbert Frew buttoned up his overcoat as he stepped from the doorway of Straddler’s Corner into the mire and slush of the street. Comparative quiet reigned at that hour in the vicinity of the Corner ; but through the half open door of one of the gin-palaces the curate could see that it was thronged with a motley assemblage, men, women, and children, grateful, no doubt, for the shelter and warmth purveyed by the publican for his customers. Gilbert Frew did not marvel to see that spectacle ; the marvel to him since his coming to London had been that he had found even so many decent, temperate, honest people in his parish. His work lay among the lowest and most vile, who could not show any visible means of earn-

ing a livelihood. When he saw their homes, or the places which mocked them with their lack of every homely attribute, he was not astonished that to them the tavern was a species of happy haven, and money only precious because it could gain them admittance to its privileges.

In common with hundreds of earnest, thinking men and women, with the welfare of his fellow-creatures at heart, Gilbert Frew had this problem, the horror of life among the lowly, before him night and day. His heart was perpetually uplifted to the almighty God, who witnessed and permitted its evil and the strange anomaly it presented. He did his own part faithfully, and through the grace of God had seen more than one brand plucked from the burning. He was only one of many concentrating every energy upon the diffusion of the gospel of peace and the highest law of liberty among these outcasts, and doubtless others could point to results as fair as his, but when it was all calculated, what did it amount to? Sometimes he was obliged to admit that so little had been done that it scarce merited recognition. There was no visible betterment of the condition of the whole; the mass of crime and misery and absolute pauperism remained untouched.

He passed down the court, and was about to turn into the street when he saw the woman he sought standing by a tavern door looking in. She saw him too, and, turning away, waited for him under the gas-lamp.

‘I was looking at these poor creatures enjoying

themselves. They have shelter and heat. We cannot grudge them that, such as it is.'

She spoke with bitterness. He saw that the scene had saddened her, that the whole way of life in the place lay heavy on her heart. She had a large heart, a widely sympathetic soul, he divined, and in a woman these are much. He felt yet more drawn to her.

'I am glad I have not missed you,' he said gently. 'I should like to talk with you. Will you accept the shelter of my umbrella?'

'Thank you, I have my own.'

He put it up for her, and they walked a few steps in silence.

'May I know whom I have the honour of addressing?' he said presently.

'It is no matter. You would not know me any better by my name. I am an obscure woman, who has known disappointment and poverty and sickness of heart. Out of these, perhaps, has grown a sympathy for others. I would do something to better their condition if I could.'

'You are very young to speak in such a strain,' he repeated involuntarily.

'So you think,' she answered; and he saw a very slight smile dawn on her lip, giving to it a matchless sweetness.

'I am interested in this question also,' said Gilbert Frew presently. 'Any new views are very welcome. No doubt you have studied it longer and more carefully than I. What do you think of its aspect just now?'

‘If you mean the condition of the lower classes, as they are called in cant phrase, it is as black as midnight. It could not possibly be worse.’

‘And the remedy?’

‘Is at hand, I hope and trust,’ she answered quickly; ‘for they are beginning to awaken themselves to a sense of the degradation and injustice under which they have so long lain passive.’

‘What injustice?’

‘Do you not know? or is it that you wish me to speak plainly?’ she asked. ‘It needs no clear vision, no special study of the life of to-day to convince one that the labour which is undoubtedly the wealth of the country is shamefully remunerated. The workers who produce all the wealth of society have no control over its production or distribution. The people, who are the mainspring of society, are treated as mere appendages to capital. A change must come, sir. There must be more equality. Labour must be recognised as the motive power in the world. At the present day production is solely in the interest of the employing classes.’

‘These are socialistic views, madam,’ said the curate.

‘Yes, I am a Socialist,’ she returned briefly.

‘I have not studied the subject. It is only since I came to London that I have been called to take a special interest in it. There is without doubt a spirit of unrest abroad among the people; but it seems to me that they do not know what they want.’

‘I can tell you. It is justice.’

‘I admit that they have grievances,’ said the

curate sadly. 'For instance, it is neither fair nor just that that old woman and the deformed lad we have just left should labour as they do for such poor remuneration. But so long as the supply of labour so far exceeds the demand, wages will continue to fall. The only remedy I can see is in emigration. We are over-populated here, beyond a doubt.'

'Yes, but there is plenty of space in London for us all. Why are we crowded into one portion of the city? That the rich may have a fine clear air to breathe, and plenty of space for their carriages to roll. It is only the accident of their birth and education that entitles them to such consideration.'

'You spoke of equality a little ago. That I hold to be impossible. Since the creation there have been men who have laboured with their heads and others with their hands. You cannot deny the greater power of intellect. If it be wisely employed in the organization of labour, and wealth be the result, would you say the man of intellect did not come by that wealth justly?'

'If his business is carried on upon the present capitalist lines, I say no. Take the present factory system, for instance. The producers receive only about a quarter of the value of their work, the employers three-quarters. Yet capital, without labour, is incapable of producing. Is not that an anomaly? Surely the half would not be too much to ask.'

'The capitalist must have a return for his risk and outlay,' said the curate.

‘Just so. Selfishness, insatiable greed for profit is at the root of the evil,’ she replied, with a slight smile. ‘Until there can be a sweeter spirit of brotherhood infused into the hearts of the rich, these wrongs will exist. The only alternative is for the labourers to take law into their hands.’

‘Nothing but the spirit of Christianity will create a sweeter brotherhood,’ said Gilbert Frew, with emphasis.

She shook her head with impatience.

‘Christianity is too often made a cloak for yet deeper, more grinding selfishness. In our investigations we have proved that the psalm-singing and church-going capitalist is the worst taskmaster and slave-driver. That theory is exploded, sir, and we are thrown back upon the higher instincts of humanity.’

‘Which are of God—planted by His hand,’ said the curate reverently. ‘How comes it that one so young, and with such undoubted capacity for happy usefulness, has so early lost a believing heart?’

‘It is not possible for me to see and know what I have seen and known and retain a faith in an all-powerful, all-tender love. They say God is a God of love and infinite compassion. So they tell them in the Hall here, and send them home to wonder when His love and compassion is going to touch them. Mr. Frew, if God indeed exist, *how can such things be?*’

‘There are thousands, madam, who bring misery and wrong upon themselves by their own conduct

of life. Would you hold God responsible for their state ?’

‘You mean that they spend in drink and other vices the meagre wages they can earn. I admit it. It is not part of our creed to shirk undeniable facts,’ she returned quietly. ‘But, on the other hand, it is the very hopelessness of their condition that makes them utterly careless regarding their conduct. The brutishness of their surroundings deadens manly feelings in their breasts. It is common for reformers, who do not understand the question, to advise the poor to be thrifty, temperate, and industrious. It is not sound advice. To raise the tone of the labourers is to improve the instruments whereby the capitalist may increase his profits. The advice may be good for the individual ; I do not deny that it is ; but for the wrongs of the class it is quite inadequate.’

‘And what, then, is your panacea ?’

‘The workers must control production until only those who work shall obtain any share of the profits. Monopolies must be abolished, and society established on a new and sound basis of brotherhood and loving-kindness.’

‘You would desire, then, to see in England a repetition of the French Revolution of 1789 ?’

‘If necessary ; but there is not absolute need. If men could be roused to a sense of their duty to their fellows, if the truest and best instincts of humanity could be awakened in their breasts, there would be no need for revolution. But I fear such a hope savours too much of Utopia. I do not

think that our higher culture or our advanced education is improving the race.'

'I repeat that it is only the blessed gospel of Christ which can rouse men to a sense of the love and duty they owe to their brothers.'

'Do you honestly believe what you say, Mr. Frew?'

'I thank God I do. I have had many sorrows in my life, madam. Out of these sorrows, by the grace of God, has arisen a stronger, more ardent desire to do what I can for the furtherance of His cause,' returned the curate, with emotion.

'I believe you are in earnest. You do good where you can. I have seen it. I have no desire to underrate your work. It will bless individuals. They are to be envied who can accept your faith with the simplicity of a child. It saves the human heart many battlings, many sore agonies, if it can thus rest implicitly on a higher power,' she said, with a strange passion.

The curate saw that the tears stood in her eyes, he detected a painful yearning in her trembling voice. His heart beat. A word in season might be blessed to this strong soul whose questionings had led it wholly astray. It might be his privilege to utter that word, to awaken in this woman's earnest heart a further questioning which might lead her to eternal peace.

'In my old home, a country village by the sea, I had a little daughter who was all the world to me,' he said in a low voice. 'How I loved her you may know some day, perhaps, when you have

children of your own. I had other children, but she was my dearest ; perhaps because she was my only daughter, perhaps because she was one of those fragile little mortals who seldom stay long on the shores of earth. Its winds and waves are too rude for them, they are only at home in the land of perpetual summer.'

'And she died?'

'Yes, on the evening of the day on which I buried her mother. She had wandered along the seashore with an old man who had been her friend and companion almost from her babyhood. A fog came down suddenly, and, wrapping them in its impenetrable folds, hid the way from them, and they were caught by the incoming tide.'

'And drowned?' she asked, with a shiver.

'Drowned at our own door. You would ask why God permitted that, madam. The child was unspeakably dear to me ; the greatest solace of a somewhat saddened life. She was a child of rare promise too, her gifts and graces were very marked at her age. I miss her, but I know my Lord has her in His keeping, and she is safe from any trouble to come. I thank God for my daughter safe in heaven, because I know that in a little while I shall go to her, though she may not return to me.'

'It is a wonderful faith, and, whether justifiable or not, must be of comfort to you,' said the stranger softly. 'You have other children ; are they all boys?'

'Yes. I have four.'

'Motherless, are they?'

‘Yes.’

‘You must have an anxious heart. But you have reason to be thankful that they are boys. There is no place for girl-children in the world. I have proved that by most bitter experience. Good-night, Mr. Frew. You have been patient under my talk.’

‘Must you go here? We shall meet again, I trust.’

‘Oh, probably. My work is here, like yours, though it has a different aim. If you care to look in at the Riveters’ Hall on Friday evening at eight o’clock you will hear of me.’

‘May I not know to whom I have been talking?’

My name would not be familiar to you,’ she said, smiling again.

‘I must not insist then. It was not mere idle curiosity which made me ask. If you are familiar with this district, perhaps you can assist me in something in which I am interested. Have you ever met or heard anything of a widow and her daughter named Holgate?’

To his astonishment she turned away, and, without a word or a sign that she had heard, stepped into a passing omnibus and was whirled away.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE STING OF REMORSE.

‘What is for me
Whose days so winterly go on?’

E. B. BROWNING.

DENIS HOLGATE, wearied of the monotony of his life, grown hopeless concerning those whom he had come to London to seek, seemed once more to be standing still. To outward seeming he was not advancing a single step in the higher life, or fulfilling a single aspiration after the noble and the good. He had come to the city filled with a high hope, with glowing visions of the wideness of a new sphere, of the opportunities for doing real good which would meet him at every turn, and lo! what was the reality? Perpetual bondage to the drudgery of his profession, under a master who demanded his pound of flesh from those whom he paid to serve him. Former experience of his medical brethren had not prepared Holgate for this; especially his pleasant relations with his colleague at Crosshaven had been poor discipline for the hard contrast he had now to face. For six-and-twenty

years life had been comparatively pleasant for Denis Holgate; he had come to manhood before he experienced a single disappointment of any consequence. He had been proud of his success, of his immunity from the cares which oppressed many others, proud of himself and his ability. He had also been girt about with an extreme selfishness, therefore this discipline was very wholesome. By slow degrees, of late years, he had learned that the world did not lie absolutely at his command, and that the circumstances of life would not always adapt themselves to his special need. He had become a humbler man, and had been obliged to cultivate that slow-growing and oftentimes painful virtue, patience.

Gilbert Frew, who had now known him for a time, saw the fine development of his character, the mellowing of his hasty judgment, the softening of his harsher, more unlovable traits,—in a word, the making of the *man*,—with a keen and joyful satisfaction. No study had afforded him such deep interest as the study of this young man. The Spirit of God had touched him; through the bitterness of a heart-disappointment he had been brought to question regarding this faith, which was the most essential part of Gilbert Frew's life, and, having found it suited to his need, had accepted it in all sincerity, and would cling to it now to the end. But though Denis Holgate was now a Christian man, he did not dwell continually on the heights, as some ardent and happy spirits do; nay, he was seldom there. Often his faith glimmered only

feebly, and was sometimes nearly quenched. It was difficult for him, sore perplexed as he was with the mysterious problems of life, to walk with blindfolded eyes in absolute trust. In his darker hours Gilbert Frew was his anchor; there was nothing he could not confide to him, no trivial question he hesitated to ask that true friend, who, having walked the narrow way for many years, could meet him with the ripe wisdom of experience. Two thoughts were never absent from the heart of Denis Holgate night nor day: the thought of his mother and Rhoda, and the memory of the woman whose sweet bearing of a heavy cross had first stirred in him the nobler thought.

She was still dear to him; she was and would remain the one love of his life. No other woman would ever fill her place. It was a high and beautiful thing his devotion to her, a deep-rooted feeling which could never do him anything but good. He was deeply grateful now to Lydia Bolsover for having released him, because, though he would most faithfully have fulfilled his duty, their marriage could not have been a perfect union. As she had said, there would be too many memories between them. But the thought of the past which concerned her would lie perpetually as a shadow on his heart. No man could more bitterly regret and deplore an unworthy action than he regretted his foolish coquetry with a woman's heart. His own pain had taught him to feel for that of others. Perhaps, too, he had now a deeper knowledge of the delicate mechanism of a woman's heart. The

sight of Winifred Barham in London had unsettled him yet more. He wondered why they were in town early in the season ; it could not be to participate in any of its pleasures, seeing the family had evidently been thrown into deep mourning by the death of the squire of Scaris Dene. The widow's bonnet framing Winifred Barham's sweet face was the only proof to Holgate that he was dead. He had seen no notice in any newspaper, and the conclusion had come upon him with a shock of surprise. When he had seen him six months ago at Crosshaven, he was, comparatively speaking, in good health, and there was no reason then why he should not live for a year or two at least. His disease had not progressed with rapidity, and it was improbable that it alone could have ended his life in so short a time. He felt anxious to know the particulars, and he even looked the Directory to find out the town house of the Holgates. It was in Hereford Gardens, and in his scanty leisure moments he began to haunt the neighbourhood. Had she been staying with any other family he would not have hesitated to call. He did not relish the thought of meeting Sir Fulke Holgate again, and would not voluntarily subject himself to the humiliation that haughty aristocrat had once heaped upon him. Even yet, when he thought of that curious experience in the library at St. Cyrus, his proud cheek burned.

In one of these strolls by Hyde Park Corner one mild, bright February afternoon Holgate had the desire of his heart.

He was leisurely walking by the end of the Row when a carriage came rolling through the gates. It held two ladies ; the one he knew, the identity of the other he guessed. He would have kept out of the way of observation, but that was not possible ; there were very few people about, and Winifred Barham saw him directly they entered the Park. A flush of pleased surprise sprang to her face ; she bowed to him, and, slightly rising, asked the coachman to stop.

‘That is Doctor Holgate, grandmamma,’ he heard her say ‘I should so like to speak to him for a moment.’

The next instant Holgate was raising his hat at the carriage door.

‘How are you?’ Winifred said pleasantly ‘Allow me to introduce you to my grandmother, Lady Holgate ; she knows you very well by repute, I assure you.’

Holgate took off his hat, and his frank, fearless eyes turned upon the proud face of the old woman who was of nearer kin to him than to Winifred Barham. She was a striking-looking handsome woman still, in spite of her great age ; her figure was held erect, her proud dark eye flashed with a light as keen as in her prime. Her thin, pale lips trembled as she looked in silence for a moment on the face of the young man at the carriage door.

‘I am pleased to make the acquaintance of any friend of my child’s,’ she said, with a gracious bow, which Holgate returned, and then fixed his eyes

once more on the sweet face of the young girl at her side. He could not but observe how fresh and girlish and free from care she looked now; it was as if some terrible strain had been removed from her. So indeed she felt.

‘Could you not come and see me?’ she asked. ‘I should like to tell you about it all. My husband died a few weeks after our return to Scaris Dene.’

‘I should like to come, Mrs. Barham, but’— He looked towards Lady Holgate. To the astonishment of Winifred Barham, she leaned forward and held out her hand.

‘Come when you like, at any hour of any day. I should like to speak with you too,’ she said, speaking under the influence of agitation. ‘When are you free?’

‘I can hardly say; but if you can fix an hour, Lady Holgate, I shall endeavour to make it suit me,’ Denis answered a little hurriedly, something of her agitation communicating itself to him.

‘Could you come this evening, then? We shall be at home from six to nine.’

‘I shall do my best to come, Lady Holgate.’

‘Very well. Do not disappoint us. Come early, because I have much to say. What is your name—your Christian name, I mean?’

‘Denis.’

The tears instantly sprang into the old woman’s eyes, and she sank back trembling among her cushions.

‘Leave us now. Tell Barrett to drive on, Winifred. I must not forget myself here,’ she said feebly. ‘Do not forget to come, then, to-night as early as possible. Good afternoon.’

Holgate confusedly raised his hat once more as the restive horses started forward, and the next moment he was left standing like a man in a dream.

Winifred Barham was much surprised. She could not understand Lady Holgate’s emotion, but she did not care to ask any question concerning it. Instead of continuing their drive, Lady Holgate gave the order to drive home. When they entered the house she asked Winifred to accompany her to her dressing-room. When they were alone the old lady sank into a chair trembling; Winifred, looking on, feared that such excitement in her delicate state of health might have serious consequences.

‘Dear grandmother,’ she said gently, ‘what has so upset you? I fear you are very unwell to-day. We should not have gone out.’

‘I am quite well in body, Winifred. It is the mind that is ill at ease,’ she said in a low voice. ‘My child, I am a very old woman now, and I have not many good deeds to look back upon. I have not long to live, and I have not much to comfort me as I draw near the grave.’

For a moment Winifred Barham did not speak, but stood leaning against the table, looking with anxious and even wondering eyes on the woman

whom she had alternately loved and feared since she had come, a timid, melancholy child, over the sea to St. Cyrus Abbey. She seemed much broken down now; the sight of the proud head bent low in self-accusation touched the heart of Winifred inexpressibly. It was like the bending of an aged tree that had braved the storms of many a winter.

‘No, I have not much to comfort me. Winifred, live your life as you have begun it,—lovingly, gently, kindly,—and when you are old you will not be haunted with the phantoms and memories of a selfish and sinful past. My dear, I have made pride my idol all my life, and it can only mock me now.’

Winifred Barham slid down upon her knees beside the old woman’s chair, and clasped the trembling hands firm and fast in her soft palms. She had laid her bonnet down, and her hair, escaping from its fastening, lay about her shoulders, and made a frame for the pure, sweet face shining with the love and compassion of her soul. Lady Holgate, looking up, fixed her eyes on the earnest face with an affectionate but melancholy smile.

‘I believe you love me, child, in spite of the hard destiny I marked out for you. If any gentler thought has ever touched my heart, my Winifred, it has come through you. Since you have come back to me you have awakened in my heart yearnings which I do not understand. Tell me, my darling, where you have found such strength

and courage and sweetness to face the ills of life ?’

‘God helped me, grandmamma, when I was hard beset,’ she answered, with a slight falter in her voice. She hid her face on the arm of the chair, and a slight tremor shook her. There were times when the memory of the bitter past was like to overwhelm Winifred Barham. Her unselfishness was a thing to marvel at, and even yet she tormented herself with reproaches, fearing lest she had not done her duty by her dead husband. Lady Holgate’s withered hand fell with an infinite tenderness on the shining head.

‘You have been a living lesson to me, my darling, since you came, a timid little child, to us so many years ago. Only I hardened my heart and closed my ears, and would not listen to the sweet messenger sent to show me my folly and my sin. Winifred, I am a miserable old woman, with the shipwreck of lives lying upon my soul. I was a mother, child, without the feelings of a mother. I have heard a voice from the dead this day.’

Winifred lifted her head suddenly and looked, not without alarm, on her grandmother’s face. She almost thought her wandering, her words had so wild a sound.

‘Yes, I have heard a voice from the dead, speaking through the voice of the living. I have looked to-day, Winifred, upon the face of my son’s son, and I know how great has been the wrong I did to him and his.’

Winifred Barham sprang to her feet in the greatness of her surprise.

‘Oh, grandmother, can it be? Doctor Holgate your grandson! — the son of Uncle Denis, whom I have always loved since the first time I saw his picture in the gallery at St. Cyrus and heard his story from Mervyn! It seems impossible. Are you sure there can be no mistake. He is not in the least like the picture of Uncle Denis, or like any of the Holgates, or I might have thought of it.’

‘No, he is not a Holgate, Winifred. He is his mother’s living image. Ah, poor Anne Braithwaite!’

Winifred Barham was silent a little. She saw that memories were crowding thick and fast upon the old woman, and that for the moment she was forgotten.

‘No, there is no mistake. Let me tell you, Winifred. When he was in Waveney, he came one night to St. Cyrus,—that night you and I dined at Rokeby,—and asked for Fulke. He treated him like a dog, Winifred, and boasted of it to me long afterwards. He did not tell me at the time. Since then I have never known peace of mind. I knew my son was dead, but I did not know till then whether he had left any child. Poor Anne Braithwaite! She must have had a fearful struggle. She was a noble and good girl, Winifred; but she was my maid, and my pride was stronger than any other feeling. And this young man is the rightful heir to St. Cyrus. Fulke will never marry now.’

‘He is a gentleman, grandmamma, and, more, he is noble and good, as you say his mother was,’ said Winifred Barham. ‘I shall never forget his goodness during these trying months at Crosshaven. But for him, dear grandmamma, I feel that I could not have borne it all as I did.’

Lady Holgate turned her eyes searchingly on the girl’s sweet face, but no flush or sign of consciousness was apparent there.

‘For that, if for nothing else, I am deeply in his debt. Come and kiss me, Winifred, and leave me for a little. I should like to lie down and try to rest. Yet I have much to think of, much to plan. What if he should not come, Winifred? That would be a fearful disappointment.’

‘He will come, dear grandmother. He promised; and Doctor Holgate never breaks his word,’ said Winifred lightly. ‘It is like a romance, and it will have a happy ending. If Uncle Denis’s wife is still alive, grandmamma, you will be good to her now.’

‘I cannot venture to hope I may have such an opportunity, child, and could I dare ask forgiveness from her? I did her a great wrong.’

‘She will forgive you, I prophesy, and I am a bird of promise,’ said Winifred, with a sunny smile, as she sped away.

Left alone, Katharine Holgate, with her head bowed down upon her hands, faced a part of her life which for years an iron will had kept in the background. In these sharp moments she recalled

a long gone agony, for she *had* suffered in the midst of her pride, she had not given up her best loved son without a pang. Of late years, when health had begun to fail, and she had had to face a future for which she was but poorly prepared, gentler thoughts had come to her, regrets had mingled strangely with her memories of the past. Her son's marriage had been a great blow to her pride, and she had hardened herself, believing that had her husband lived, he would have acted in the same way; old Sir Fulke had made everything subservient to his family pride. She wished now she had been less hard; if only she had sent her son and his lowly-born wife on their way with one word of comfort or of kindness, if only she had been allowed to whisper her regret to him before he died! She remembered Anne Braithwaite, as she sat there in the quiet room; her gentle, dignified, ladylike ways, her beautiful face, her soft and helpful hands; and wondered what she would look like now, what traces the struggle of a lifetime had left upon her. She had done well by the son her husband had left to her care, she had sent him forth well equipped into the world, but at what cost? Katharine Holgate could not but ask herself the question self-accusingly, for, while she had had enough and to spare, her son's widow and child might sometimes have known the lack of daily bread. She rose heavily to her feet, and began to pace the room, her velvet robe trailing noiselessly behind her, her slender ringed hands nervously clasped, her proud mouth trembling, her eyes dim

that they could not see. Remorse had its hold upon the heart of Katharine, Lady Holgate, and its pangs were not easy for her to bear. Meanwhile Winifred, dear heart, had stolen to the library, and, opening the organ there, was playing low and softly to herself. A sweet peace was in her heart; for the first time for many months she felt most utterly at rest. She could not tell why, but it seemed as if the desire of her heart had been given her that day. She knew she was glad when her eyes dwelt on the face of Denis Holgate. He was her dear, true friend, who had helped her in the old sad days; and now he might be more, they could claim a tie of kinship, which though distant might be very sweet. So she was thinking and playing softly in the twilight when he came into the room. She was not surprised, she was thinking of and expecting him. So she said when she rose and with one white hand laid lightly on the keys turned and extended the other to him in friendliest greeting.

‘Good-evening,’ she said, and a sweet smile touched her lips. ‘We must shake hands again, I think. Grandmamma has told me, Doctor Holgate, and we are cousins, are we not?’

He took her hand; his own trembled at its soft touch. His face was very earnest as he bent over it.

‘If you will accord me the privileges of cousinship, they will be very precious to me,’ he said, smiling too. He did not presume to call her by

her name. His manner was modest, unassuming, but wholly manly.

She sat down again, and ran her fingers softly and lightly over the keys. Both were silent, but not embarrassed ; they seemed to know each other so well. Holgate's heart was filled with unspeakable yearning as he looked at the womanly head, at the graceful, girlish figure in its black robe, sad emblem of her past wifhood. How he loved her he had scarcely realized till now, when the possibility of winning her was within his reach. If he wooed, he had a man's chance to win ; but what could he offer her ? A slight and bitter smile came upon his lips, and as she turned her head presently she saw it.

‘ What is it, Cousin Denis ? — may I call you that ? How miserable you look ! What has vexed you ? Are you sorry to make friends with your relatives ? ’

‘ No ; I was not thinking of that, Mrs. Barham, he said, getting out the name with difficulty.

She turned round on the organ seat and faced him, with hands lightly folded on her lap. He saw her face pale a little and a touch of the old sad earnestness creep to her mouth. He was not surprised, therefore, at her next words.

‘ I should like to tell you just how it happened,’ she said hurriedly. ‘ It was very soon after we reached home. He caught a cold on the journey, and, being so weak, he could not throw it off. Were you surprised to hear of his death ? ’

‘ I did not hear of it ; I only surmised it about a

fortnight ago, when I met you driving with Lady Holgate in Oxford Street.'

'Did you meet us? Why did you not speak to us?'

'I would have spoken had you been alone, Mrs. Barham.'

'Did you know then that Lady Holgate was your grandmother? Oh, of course you did!' said Winifred quickly. 'I cannot believe that you are the son of Uncle Denis, of whom I have heard so much. It is like a romance. Is not life full of strange and painful histories?'

'It is indeed, Mrs. Barham,' said Holgate, with bitterness. 'It is a record of mistakes and sins from first to last, but these do not go unpunished.'

'Is your mother alive yet, Dr. Holgate?'

'I would I could say I knew, Mrs. Barham. I am a miserable man,' returned Holgate gloomily.

Winifred looked up in startled surprise, and at that moment a servant entered the room.

'Lady Holgate will see you in the drawing-room, sir, if you please,' he said. Holgate nodded and turned to go. Winifred Barham, noting his knit brows and compressed lips, took a step timidly towards him. She would plead for the proud heart up-stairs, anxious, if it knew how, to atone for the injustice of the past.

'Be gentle with grandmamma,' she said softly. 'She is much broken down. She has been very ill, you know; that is why we are here. Be kind to her, as you have been kind to me.'

Holgate's face flushed, but he did not speak.

Under his earnest gaze the colour slowly rose in Winifred's cheek, and she turned away, not knowing why she should feel confused.

He passed out of the room, and she heard him go up-stairs. She went back to the organ seat, but she did not play any more. And that slight sweet blush remained, as if painted on her cheek.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE SAD PAST.

'Oh that the things which have been were not now
In memory's resurrection !'

BAILEY.

DENIS HOLGATE was not conscious of any excitement as he followed the servant up-stairs to the drawing-room. Time was when this would have been a momentous moment for him. In the idle days when St. Cyrus had been the idol of his dreams, he would have been a proud and happy man had he been about to meet Lady Holgate in her own drawing-room at her own request. But it was different now. He had set his thoughts upon more earnest themes ; life for him now held things more precious than St. Cyrus. There were disappointments a thousand times more bitter than any connected with that old heritage, living interests in which he was bound up heart and soul. He entered the room unhesitatingly, and approached the figure he saw at the other end with a fearless step. She watched him come, and her old eyes grew bright with pride over him, her son's son, heir to his heritage and his name ! It

was a curious meeting. Holgate was observant of each little outward circumstance connected with it, just as if he had been an eye-witness, not the most deeply interested person whom the issues would most seriously affect. He saw that she was deeply moved, that she could not speak. She motioned him to a chair; in response he placed one for her, and asked her gently to be seated.

‘No,’ she said at length; ‘I could not rest. I am excited and unstrung. So you are Denis Holgate, my son’s son! Will you shake hands with your grandmother, young man?’

But that she was so serious, Holgate must have smiled at the curious form of her address. He took the offered hand and held it a moment, then she drew it away.

‘You are not at all surprised nor overcome by this meeting,’ she said. ‘Either you are not deeply interested or you have your feelings well in curb. You are like your mother, boy—so like that I seem to see her reproachful eyes in yours. I did wrong, Denis, I admit; but there was some excuse for me. I deeply regret it now. I would give all I have to undo the past. If I could live my life over again, my son’s wife, whoever she might be, would be my daughter, if she was a good woman and he loved her. Your mother fulfilled these conditions, but I was hard of heart, and drove her away with cruel words. Do you think she will forget or forgive these words? Anne Braithwaite will not forget; she had a deep soul. But do you think she will forgive?’

‘I know not, indeed, Lady Holgate, whether my mother is alive to forget or forgive,’ said Denis Holgate wearily. ‘I have been seeking her in vain for months.’

‘Seeking her! Where? How is she lost? It is your mother, boy, I am speaking of—Anne Braithwaite, who married my son Denis. Where is she now?’

She raised her voice a little, and drew her fine figure up with a touch of command.

‘I do not know. If you will sit down, Lady Holgate, I shall try to make you understand this apparent mystery. It is not a story which will raise me in your estimation; but I shall not spare myself. I was wholly to blame.’

Lady Holgate was much surprised. Her agitation increased. She was glad to sink into a chair, for her limbs could scarcely sustain her weight.

Briefly Denis Holgate recounted the main incidents of his life, Lady Holgate listening with an intense and absorbing interest.

‘And she gave you up?’ she repeated slowly. ‘It was her idea of justice, no doubt, because your father gave up so much for her. It was a noble sacrifice; but it was like Anne Braithwaite. Your mother is a heroine, Denis. I pray I may not have discovered it too late.’

‘And what am I, Lady Holgate?’ asked the surgeon, with a sad smile. ‘Have you no condemnation for me? I have done my mother a greater wrong, since it was for me the sacrifice was made. What have I given her in return? I could

sink to the earth with the shame of it. And my poor sister! When I walk these London streets sometimes, Lady Holgate, I am pursued by a haunting fear lest she, left to herself, should have become a waif in this great and evil city. There are times when my burden is greater than I can bear.'

'We must make search without delay,' cried Lady Holgate, rising as if imbued with a new energy. 'No expense must be spared. The best means must be employed. If they are alive and in London we shall find them, my boy, before we are many hours older.'

The surgeon shook his head.

'I have not been idle. Do you suppose I have not been searching? This cruel uncertainty may be my punishment for my sin, and, though it may seem well-nigh unbearable, I cannot say it is undeserved.'

'You are hard upon yourself. You only obeyed your mother's behest. It was she who made the mistake. I grant that one was made. You were young, and could not be expected to judge between right and wrong. See how quickly you have striven to do right when a larger knowledge has come to you.'

It was a kindly thought which prompted her to comfort him. This new gentleness and thought for another was inexpressibly beautiful in this proud woman. It touched Holgate; he raised grateful eyes to her face.

'You comfort me,' he said simply. 'I thank you for it, Lady Holgate.'

‘Do not thank me. It is nothing. You ought to reproach me. It is at my door all this wrong and misery must be laid,’ she said quickly. ‘I do most bitterly regret it. What you have told me has added a new bitterness to that regret. But we will be hopeful. All may yet be well.’

‘I have not given up hope,’ said Holgate, but not in a very hopeful voice.

‘You have not told me yet what way of life you pursue in London. Are you in practice?’ she asked.

‘No; I am only an assistant, and likely to remain so for some time. I have not the heart to strive for anything higher yet. Until I have learned the whereabouts or the fate of my mother, Lady Holgate, I am practically a useless man.’

‘Give up whatever tie you have made and come here. It is your rightful place,’ she said quickly. He shook his head.

‘I shall come, if you will permit me, from time to time, while you are in town,’ he answered quietly.

‘Why will you not come? Is it pride, or a feeling of pique against us? Do you know you are your uncle’s heir?’

‘I may be; but, though I do not bear malice, I have no desire to see Sir Fulke again,’ said Holgate, still quietly, but with slightly heightened colour.

Katharine Holgate admired him for that touch of pride.

‘I admit that your uncle is not the most amiable of men, but you need not come in contact with him, nor even go near St. Cyrus while he is there. I

would not ask you to be dependent on him. I am a rich woman, Denis; my money and my lands are yours by right as they were your father's. Is not that a different thing?'

'You are generous and kind, Lady Holgate,' returned the surgeon in the same quiet way. 'But in the meantime I would rather fight my own battle. Suppose I was in full enjoyment of your generous kindness, would I be a happier man? I will gladly take your money, if you will give it, for the benefit of the poor creatures with whom my work brings me in contact; for myself I cannot take it.'

'You have your mother's pride, Denis. Perhaps when you know me a little better you will grant an old woman's whim. You knew, I suppose, that Mrs. Barham, whom you knew at Crosshaven, was the daughter of the wife my youngest son Bevis married at Bombay.'

'Yes, I knew that. When I was at Waveney they told me the story.'

'When her parents were drowned she was sent home to us, though she had no claim upon us. God forgive us! we were not very kind to the poor child. It might have been as well had she remained in India. When she grew up a fair sweet girl, you can imagine what like she was. Your uncle Fulke fell in love with her, Denis.'

'So they told me at Waveney, Lady Holgate.'

'Did they tell you, too, that we forced her into marriage with a man whom she did not, could not love, with whom she had not even a thought in common?'

‘I saw that for myself at Crosshaven, Lady Holgate,’ said the surgeon, and slightly turned his head away.

‘It was a cruel shame. If she were not an angel, Denis, she would hate us. Yet she is my greatest comfort now. There is no hardness in her heart against me; but she will not go where your uncle is, Denis. She mistrusts him, her heart is not at rest in his presence. I have not been at St. Cyrus since Guy Barham’s death. Winifred and I have been at Scaris Dene together, and now we are here for my health. I have required to consult a physician here. We intend to spend a few weeks at Crosshaven, in the Rectory, if it is possible to get the house. Will you come and see us there?’

‘Thank you, I will.’

‘I have no comfort on the face of the earth except Winifred, Denis. My son Fulke and I do not agree. Perhaps we are too much alike. I have not had much happiness in my children. The one who would have done his duty for love of me I banished from my presence. Do you remember your father?’

‘Not vividly. I have a faint remembrance of some one who was always ill, but who spoke very kindly and used to pat me on the head. Rhoda could not remember him at all.’

‘Rhoda? Tell me about Rhoda, my own granddaughter! Perhaps if we find her she may allow me to love her. Is she like you?’

‘She was not when I last saw her. Poor Rhoda! A lifetime of earnest reparation could never take

away the sting of my self-reproach. I despised her because she was poor and ignorant. I did not think of my own complete selfishness in taking all, while she had nothing. It stands before me now with fearful vividness. I must go now, Lady Holgate. I have already outstayed my scanty leisure.'

She looked at him with yearning, affectionate eyes.

'I can scarcely let you go. Your place is here; you are my son's son,' she repeated, as if she loved the words.

'I shall come back,' he said, with a slight smile.

'But it is not right nor fit that a Holgate should labour as you are doing in such a way. You should not be at the call of any man.'

'I pray that no Holgate may ever sink lower. It is at least honourable toil,' said Denis quickly. He could not help the reproach. It sprang to his lips and escaped them before he could keep it back. But it did not offend her; she felt the truth of his words.

'You are right,' she said humbly; 'I spoke without thinking. It is a fearful thing this pride which rules the world, Denis.'

He was silent a moment, recalling that evening years ago in the little house in Hanbury Lane, when his mother had spoken words to the same effect. It seemed a lifetime since then. He turned to her listlessly, for one thought was so absorbing that the full interest of any other thing was marred for him. He was in his grandmother's

house, acknowledged by her; she was begging him to make his home with her, to take all she could give, and it was as nothing to him. He felt no desire for the things she offered. Surely there was a great change in Denis Holgate since the days when he had haunted St. Cyrus, dreaming of it night and day.

‘You must see Winifred, Denis. I should like to introduce you on the new footing. You are cousins, you know,’ said Lady Holgate, rising and moving towards the fireplace to ring the bell.

‘I saw her down-stairs. She was in the library when I was shown in. If you will excuse me, I shall go now. I must make haste, or Doctor Parsons will take me to task. Good evening, Lady Holgate.’

‘Is it to be Lady Holgate always? I am your grandmother, boy. Is it so hard for you to have a kindly feeling towards me?’ she asked, as she took his strong hand in her poor nervous clasp. Tears were in her proud eyes, her mouth trembled, her heart was yearning over the lad. She saw in him one she could love and trust, in whom she could take pride as she had never taken pride in her own. And she had had no hand in the building up of this fine manly character; it was the work of others in which she must take pride now.

To do the right thing at the right moment, to utter just what words were fittest and best for the occasion, was natural to Denis Holgate. He bent his head and kissed the deep-lined brow, saying, with a slight smile, but with earnest, speaking eyes,—

‘Good-bye, grandmother. I shall come back very soon. I think we will be friends.’

‘And you forgive the past? When I see your kindly eyes bent upon me, I feel as if my son had forgiven me,’ she said falteringly. ‘You will be certain to come back? If I were to lose you now, Denis, it would break my heart.’

‘I will come again, if I can, to-morrow, grandmother,’ he repeated as he left the room. When he went down-stairs he found Winifred standing within the curtains at the library door. Her eyes were full of questioning. He could not but enter the room a moment with her, to set her anxiety at rest.

‘I hope it is all right, and that you and grand-mamma are friends, Doctor Holgate?’

‘It is all right. I am very sorry for her. How true it is, Mrs. Barham, that all our mistakes and shortcomings bring their own weight of care in their train. The past is lying heavy on her heart. Pray for us both, that we may have opportunity granted to make reparation.’

‘I do not quite understand you,’ she said. ‘What have you done that needs reparation? You, who have ever been ready to help others to the uttermost; whose life, even now, is wholly given up for others!’

‘I only wish your sweet opinion of me were justified, Mrs. Barham,’ he said in a low voice. ‘Lady Holgate will tell you. Try not to think too hardly of me.’

In her deep interest and strong sympathy, it seemed natural that she should go near to him,

that she should lay her kind hand on his arm. She did not notice how his face flushed at her gentle touch.

‘Whatever I may hear, it will not change me. I shall never forget that you were my friend when I most needed one, when, but for you, I was most utterly alone. Nothing can ever alter that, or make it less precious in my eyes.’

He bent his eyes on her sweet, earnest face, which was shining upon him like that of an angel of promise. A moment more, and he must have forgotten himself, and uttered words which he might wish to recall.

‘For that I thank you. God bless you, Winifred Barham, for ever and ever, and make you a blessing to others, as you have been to me!’ he said hoarsely, and without another word quitted her presence.

She was left bewildered by the strange abruptness of his manner; her heart was beating; she seemed to feel his earnest, passionate look in her very soul. I believe that at that moment, and for the first time, it dawned upon her that there might be in life a love which could give to the human heart a foretaste of heaven. She crept back to the organ seat, and, crouching there in the shadows, bent her head on the keys, and sat silent a long, long time. It was an hour of awakening for Winifred Barham. Her life, instead of being ended as she had sometimes thought, looking back on the long, sad past, was all before her, full of loveliest promise, of possibilities which might yet give to her womanhood its sweetest crown.

The time had sped quickly while Denis Holgate was in the house. He was astonished when, looking at his watch on the steps outside the door, he found that it was nearly nine o'clock. As he hurried into the street, he saw a figure walking leisurely to and fro the pavement. As he drew nearer he recognised Gilbert Frew. Needless to say, that faithful friend had been made acquainted with the event of the day, but it was not altogether anxiety to hear the result of his interview with Lady Holgate that had brought him to Hereford Gardens.

'I am lying in wait for you, you see!' he said, meeting him with a smile. 'Now tell me, can you go with me to a meeting in the Riveters' Hall in Mile End Road?'

Holgate shook his head as he linked his arm through that of his friend.

'Not to-night. Parsons will have a few select remarks to make as it is. Well, I have bearded the lion in his den, Gilbert. It has not been a very trying ordeal. My grandmother, in spite of her pride and her high estate, is only a woman after all; and she has fretted herself nearly into the grave over a wrong which she might have righted long ago. She was very kind to me.'

'There was no reason why she should not be,' said Gilbert Frew a trifle drily. 'Did she look down upon you from a condescending height?'

'Oh no, there was nothing of that kind about her. That sweet soul who is with her has influenced her, as she influenced me.'

'You saw Mrs. Barham, then?'

‘Yes, I saw her. It has not done me good, Gilbert. I love her a thousand times more dearly than ever, if that were possible.’

‘And why should you not? The future is full of sweet promise for you, Denis. Keep up a brave heart. Brighter days are at hand for you all.’

The surgeon once more shook his head.

‘So long as the old shadow lies on my heart, Gilbert, I must think of nothing else.’

‘That, too, may lift,’ said the curate cheerily. ‘The darkest hour—you know the rest. Well, are you coming to that meeting with me?’

‘I can’t; I must go to my work. Besides it is too late. What kind of a meeting is it?’

‘I don’t quite know, but I believe we can drop in at any time. I want you to come, Denis, if only for five minutes.’

‘The Riveters’ Hall! That’s a queer place, Gilbert,’ said Holgate, recalling the meeting-place. ‘Well, I’ll come if there’s nothing particular to do, though I don’t know what good five minutes in such a place will do us. It will be long enough, however. We had better take this hansom and drive to Parsons’, and thence to the Hall then.’

The curate nodded, and in a few moments they were being rapidly whirled through the streets to the East End. They did not talk much, each being busy with his own thoughts. It was Friday night, and, referring to his note-book early in the evening, the curate had found that it was the night that the stranger he had met at Straddler’s Corner had invited him to visit the Riveters’ Hall. They

found Doctor Parsons out, and, there being no message for the assistant, they drove on to the Hall in Mile End Road. They dismissed the hansom before they reached the door, and walked in quietly, though their entrance was commented on by a few loungers about the steps. Both were well known in the district.

The curate led the way, conscious of a strong excitement; Holgate followed carelessly, wondering a little as to the meaning of this freak of his friend's. As they entered the gallery, there was a hearty round of applause, the audience being on their feet, waving their hats and handkerchiefs. It was a motley assemblage; and there were evidently some of the roughest elements of Whitechapel present. On the brilliantly lighted platform there were two people; a puffy-looking individual, evidently the president of the meeting, seated in a chair, and the figure of a woman standing at the table, with one ungloved hand lying on some papers from which she seemed to have been speaking. She wore a plain black gown, which showed a fine, graceful, ladylike figure, and the close bonnet made no unbecoming frame for a singularly beautiful face. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheek flushed with excitement. Gilbert Frew noted all these details the moment he entered the gallery door. His friend, being behind, could not see until he stepped aside to let him forward.

'There is a lady on the platform, Denis. It is she whom I wish you to see. Do you know her?'

'It is not likely. What an odd question!' said

Holgate, with a laugh, as he stepped forward to obtain a fuller view of the platform.

It was a moment of curious suspense for the curate. He did not know till then what hopes he had built on a possibility which might be utterly without foundation. He watched his friend keenly, and instantly saw a strange grey pallor creep up over his face. He caught his arm as he staggered back.

‘Let me out, Gilbert, for a breath of air away from these staring eyes. As I live, that is my sister Rhoda!’





CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE CONQUERS ALL.

‘Love doth ever shed
Rich healing where it nestles—spread
O’er desert pillows some green palm.’

GERALD MASSEY.

QUEN the landing outside they stood still, and Holgate leaned against the wall. He was quite overcome. Gilbert Frew wisely let him alone for a little, and himself paced slowly to and fro the long passage. From within the clear, sweet tones of the lecturer’s voice were audible, though they could not distinguish the words.

‘I have hoped and prayed for this, Denis,’ said the curate at last, pausing before his friend with a bright, happy face. ‘I thank God for the fulfilment of your hopes, for the answer to my prayers.’

Holgate started up and caught him by the arm.

‘Let us go in and hear what she is talking about,’ he said excitedly.

They entered the gallery door, and, standing well back behind a sheltering pillar, looked and listened

with the rest. It was a very curious experience for them both, one which it was not likely they would ever forget. Both were absorbed in the personality of the speaker; Denis fixed his eyes on her face with a gaze which might have attracted her, and he wondered as he looked. Could that beautiful woman, with the proud, high-bred face and the grace of a queen, be the poor depressed girl whom he had been wont to regard with a half contemptuous pity in the old mistaken days? He was struck by one thing chiefly—her striking resemblance to Sir Fulke Holgate. The beauty she had inherited from her high-born father had now developed, and she carried her birthright in every movement,—every gesture was instinct with a natural grace. Rhoda was a lady; there was nothing common about her now. She stood before her audience like one born to command. They hung in breathless attention upon her words, impressed as much by her personality as by the message she had for them. Holgate and his friend only heard the closing words of her address, but from them they gathered what had been its gist. She spoke quietly, and not with the enthusiasm which Gilbert Frew, remembering the bitter emphasis of her conversation with him, might have expected. There was nothing bold or unwomanly in her action or attitude, but the very idea of seeing his sister there made Denis Holgate sick at heart.

‘We have seen, then, my friends,’ she said, ‘some of the fearful results accruing from this competitive system which leaves capital wholly in the hands of

individuals. A few are rich, some free from sordid care, but the majority are in poverty, and a large number in abject misery. We have also touched upon the immediate and sole remedy. I have only to impress it once more upon you before I sit down. Poverty and degradation have too long been your portion, you in whose hands alone the production of wealth lies. On scanty and uncertain wages you are expected to maintain the independence, self-respect, and honesty of men and women. The selfish rich capitalists, who so long have been your taskmasters, must be shown the impossibility of this. If need be, they must be made to taste the sweets of badly paid labour themselves. There must be no more creating of wealth for the individual. You must learn and realize the responsibility of your unused powers. The oppressors soon will need to look to themselves and their children, for, unless some of the fearful wrongs of the poor are redressed, a desperate and miserable people will rise to seek justice for themselves. The revolution will come; already its shadow is upon us. We must be prepared for it; we must see to it that those who rise when the day comes are a combined and intelligent people, wise enough to know their own rights, strong enough to insist upon them, and disciplined and honourable enough to guard them in purity when they are won. Till then take courage, gather strength, and look into the future with hopeful, happy hearts. The dark clouds are rolling backward from the horizon, the dayspring of peace, and prosperity, and absolute relief from

sordid care for yourselves and your children, is at hand.'

She stepped back from the table a little hurriedly, and took the chair the president of the meeting at that moment vacated. Amid the deafening applause he took her place, and began his remarks with a complacent and singularly unpleasant smile.

They were not at all to the point, and consisted of fulsome and vulgar compliments applied to the lecturer. The two behind the pillar in the gallery saw a look of weariness and disgust on her face, and the vociferous applause with which her chairman's eulogiums were received by the audience made her cheek burn. Immediately he had concluded, she rose and swept off the platform. Again Holgate grasped his friend's arm.

'Come,' he said hoarsely. 'We must go round to the rooms and see her. We may lose her, Gilbert. I dare not miss this opportunity.'

'We could not lose her entirely now. From here she could be easily traced,' the curate answered. 'But we had better go round. You will not be satisfied else.'

'To see her there, Gilbert—it unmanned me!' he said as they sped down-stairs.

'Hush, Denis! Be grateful to God that it is no worse,' was the reply, and Denis felt himself rebuked. The curate led the way, and, asking a man lingering in an inner lobby, evidently a caretaker, in which room the lady could be found, was pointed to a door at the farther end.

He knocked there, and was immediately asked

to enter. When they opened the door they saw the lady standing at the table tying up the papers she had used in the hall.

‘Is that my cab? I shall be out presently. Does it rain, Jacobs?’

Receiving no answer, she swiftly turned her head. The two men entered the room and shut the door.

‘I shall go, Denis,’ said the curate, taking a backward step; but Holgate held him by the arm.

‘No, stay; I have no secrets from you,’ he said. Then there was a moment’s absolute and painful silence in the room.

Her recognition of her brother was instantaneous. The colour died out of her face, till she became white to the very lips. Her hand trembled slightly, but she tried to recover herself; she drew herself up and looked him straight in the face with cold inquiry. She did not even appear to recognise Gilbert Frew.

‘Well?’ she said, and her voice was curiously clear and calm. ‘What do you want with me, Denis Holgate?’

Then a strange thing happened. Denis Holgate sat down by the table, and, burying his head upon his hands, burst into tears. For a few seconds there was no sound but the voice of a strong man sobbing in the room. The curate felt his own composure going, and, what was more important, he fancied he saw Rhoda’s proud mouth quiver. Just then the door opening on to the platform was opened, and the chairman, rubbing his hands, and wearing the same bland, disagreeable smile, was about

to enter, when she turned her head, and waved him back.

‘Be good enough, Mr. Grotham, to withdraw, and leave me alone with these gentlemen,’ she said, with the gesture and the look of a queen.

Mr. Grotham hastily withdrew and shut the door. The greatness of the surprise and bewilderment on his face was comical. Gilbert Frew, without a word, opened the door by which he had entered and left the room also. What these two had to say to each other, no stranger had any right to hear. So they were left alone.

Rhoda Holgate, without glancing again at her brother, continued the rolling of her papers; but now her hands shook, one by one the loose sheets fluttered to the floor. Her excitement was rising; she knew she could not much longer be calm. She leaned against the wall and folded her arms. Her brows were knit, her eyes troubled, her mouth now and again visibly trembled. She felt the unutterable yearnings of her heart; had she obeyed their behest, she would have knelt by his side and laid her arms about his neck. He was her brother, and she loved him. She scorned herself even while she admitted it. Did he deserve her love? she asked herself bitterly. Perhaps not, but the fact remained. It is the mark of highest womanhood to love and to forgive seventy times seven. But Rhoda was supposed to have abjured the weaknesses of her sex; she ought by this time to have been above being moved even by the tears of a brother. She could not understand this thing at all. It puzzled and

troubled her to see him there, apparently in the abandonment of grief. Of course she knew nothing of the long strain of suspense and anxiety he had borne, else she would have understood. That strain removed, he could not sustain his self-control, pent-up feeling demanded its most natural vent.

It seemed a long time before he spoke. In reality it was but a few minutes. Before she had time to think the matter out, he rose suddenly and knelt at her feet, catching her hands in a grip from which she could not release them. She felt them wet with his tears.

‘Rhoda,’ he said, and the tones of his voice, so long unheard, went to her heart, ‘will you forgive me? I cannot explain away or excuse what I have done; only forgive me, and let me live to atone for the past.’

A strange feeling came over Rhoda. She had never heard such words. She did not know how her heart had hungered for love. It had asked bread, and she had given it a stone. Since she had crossed the threshold of womanhood she had learned that there is nothing upon the wide earth will satisfy a woman’s need save love alone. But she had battled bravely on, doing good according to her light, making herself the slave of a mistaken idea, yet with a motive which was wholly noble and pure. She had sometimes, in her most bitter moments, pictured a meeting with the brother who had turned his back upon them because they were poor; she had even mapped out a course of action, and planned the scathing words she should utter

when that day came. What did she do now? Did she draw herself up, and with finger of unutterable scorn point him away from her? Did she heap reproach upon him, taunt him with his selfishness, and bid him go, for those whom he had left had no need of him, having cast him off? She lifted one hand and laid it on his head, and her own tears fell upon it. He felt them, and, rising slowly to his feet, looked into her eyes, and, putting his arm about her, drew her to his heart. And there was a long, long silence in the room. Rhoda loved the touch of that sheltering arm; she nestled close to it and hid her head upon his breast. And Denis Holgate clasped his sister yet more closely, and thanked God as he had never yet thanked Him. A strange, deep, sweet peace seemed to fall upon both their hearts. To Rhoda it was as if after strong battling with wind and wave she had been wafted into port. She had not a question to ask. She knew that all was well, that Denis had come back, to be what he had never been, that now she knew something of the sweetness of the tie between brother and sister. She had not even a desire to ask how it had come about; she accepted the joy which had come thankfully and without a misgiving or a doubt. A true woman was Rhoda then, after all.

‘Our mother, Denis,’ she said at length. ‘Let us go to her.’

‘I feared to ask,’ he faltered, with a great earnestness. ‘Is she yet alive?’

‘Yes; not so well as she used to be,’ said Rhoda, touching but lightly on what had been, lest she

should pain him more. 'But you will make her well.'

She smiled as she released herself from his encircling arm. No face ever was more beautiful than hers, bathed in the glory of that smile.

'You are forgetting your papers, Rhoda,' he said, pointing to the scattering on the floor.

'Let them lie; poor rubbish at best!' she said, with a swift, strange smile. 'I preach what I do not believe, Denis. It is a case of taking the long journey or none at all. I am sick of it, and growing more sick every day. Come, let us go.'

She took his arm and leaned upon it, looking up with radiant eyes into his face. I fear this change in Rhoda may seem unreal, too sudden a transformation, but it had been working in her heart for long. She had found the emptiness of the things she was pursuing; this unlooked-for restoration was the crowning touch. She did nothing by halves; wholly or not at all was her creed. Her absolute forgiveness, her sweet welcome of the long lost one, was characteristic of the whole woman. A great woman, a grand woman, who would yet make of life a grand sweet song, was Rhoda Holgate. She was just at the turning-point. The Lord in His mercy knew how to deal with her. He would yet lead her to loveliest consecration of her life to His service and praise.

In the corridor outside they came upon Gilbert Frew. They had forgotten him, but now Rhoda had time to wonder how he had come there. He

did not wait for them, but went out to the street, and was standing at the cab door when they came out. A look at their faces was enough for him, and a smile came to his lips. There were a few loungers on the steps waiting to see the lecturer drive away, but she did not appear to see them as she passed out, leaning on her brother's arm.

‘Rhoda,’ said Denis Holgate, ‘let me introduce to you Gilbert Frew, the best and truest friend man ever had. Gilbert, you see my sister has forgiven me.’

His voice was unsteady. The curate saw how deep was the emotion surging in his soul. He looked at Rhoda and extended his hand. She laid hers in it with a radiant smile. She knew that she was pleased to see him at that moment, that he did not seem to be an intruder.

‘We are friends already,’ he said. ‘Now, where is your man to go? He is growing impatient.’

Denis Holgate opened the cab door and helped his sister in, then motioned to his friend. But he drew back.

‘Not to-night. You have no need for me. To-morrow I shall see you. Good-night, and God bless you both.’

So saying, he raised his hat, and before they could detain him he was gone.

‘The man knows where to go. He has often driven me,’ said Rhoda, and Denis stepped in beside her and shut the door.

‘I don’t want to say very much to-night, Rhoda, though I have a long, long story to tell,’ he said, as they drove away. ‘But I must ask one thing. Why did our mother leave Hanbury Lane? Did the business fall away?’

‘No. It was I who did it,’ Rhoda returned in a low voice. ‘Soon after you went away her health began to droop. It was just as if her interest in life had expired. She seemed to have nothing to do. I always hated the shop, Denis, and when it was left almost entirely to my care the custom dwindled away. I had become interested in other things, and acquainted with people who wished to secure my services. I have been very selfish, Denis. My way of life has been and is a grief to my mother, but I have not minded that. I have cared for her needs; she lacks for nothing. I am well paid for the work I do; but I have never considered her scruples. She has never heard me speak in public. She will not listen to me when I talk of my work, nor read the books and pamphlets I take to the house. I am beginning to think she is right and I am wrong. There is good in socialism, but I cannot go so far as they require me. I uttered things to-night I did not believe. I have often spoken against my convictions. I do believe the poor have great and crying wrongs requiring redress, but socialism will not work the cure. Now that I am behind the scenes, I have seen many things I cannot approve. The very selfishness and greed they condemn is too often the mainspring of their own lives. Before long I

should have separated myself from them, even had you not come back. Of late I have begun to ponder things in my heart. I am a different woman, Denis, from what I have been, but I have much to ask forgiveness for. God has been merciful to me.'

'And to me,' said Denis, with a full heart.

'You have no wife, have you, Denis?' was his sister's next unexpected question.

'No; but to-morrow, Rhoda, I shall tell you all my experiences. They have not been unchequered. I seem to have lived a lifetime since the old days in Hanbury Lane.'

'And I also; my experience has not been a common one. You must be prepared to see a change in our mother, Denis. She has not been strong for months. I sometimes think she has no wish to live. She will not have the advice I urge upon her. She will do anything for *you*.'

'Does she ever speak of me?'

'Never; but I know you are never absent from her heart, and I have heard her in her sleep speak of you. You need not fear for her welcome. She has a larger heart than I. I do not altogether understand all the past, but I cannot but think she regrets it. I have heard her say that if she had her life to live she would live it differently. She thinks she has not done her duty by me.'

Denis was silent. He could not say otherwise. His mother had not done well by Rhoda. The

wonder to him was that his sister should have developed into such a woman, the result of that early injustice might have been so sadly different.

His train of thought was interrupted presently by the stoppage of the cab. When he alighted he saw that they were in a quiet, retired, respectable street, though he had no idea what direction they had come. Rhoda's hand trembled as she fitted her key in the door.

'Come in. She will not be in bed. She waits for me lying on the sofa in that room,' she said, pointing to the door. 'Will you go in alone?'

'The shock, Rhoda?' said Denis hesitatingly. 'If she is not strong.'

'Joy seldom kills,' said Rhoda cheerily as she laid her cloak down. She seemed like a new creature. Her brother grew more amazed every moment at the change.

Rhoda stepped forward and opened the door. A cheerful glow fell athwart the little hall. Nothing could have been more snug and homelike than the picture Denis Holgate saw within. A well furnished room, a daintily spread table, a cheerful fire, and a sofa whereon lay a figure in an attitude of rest, with half-closed eyes fixed dreamily on the fire. He knew a great change on that face; it was worn and wasted to a degree, and the hair under the dainty lace cap was white as snow. She seemed at peace, and surrounded by every comfort, given to her by her daughter; she owed nothing

to him, Denis thought, with a sharp, reproachful pang.

‘Is that you, Rhoda? You are a little late, dear. Just make the coffee before you come in. Are you very tired?’

To the astonishment of Denis, Rhoda stepped lightly to the side of the couch, motioning him to stand back. She knelt down and put an arm under her mother’s head; the look they exchanged was one of fullest confidence and love. Here, too, was a great change—the greatest change of all.

‘Why, my darling, how well you look!’ he heard his mother say. ‘I have never seen you look so lovely. What has come to you to-day?’

‘A great, great joy, mother, for you and me,’ she said simply. ‘I have brought something for you to-night, mother, a very precious gift,’ she added brightly, yet through falling tears.

‘What is that? What can you give me more than you have done, my daughter? No mother ever had a more loving, dutiful, generous child,’ said Anne Holgate, and her thin hand lay caressingly on Rhoda’s bright hair.

‘You think too well of me, mother. I am not good. Not so long ago I was neither dutiful nor generous. It is you, mother, who are good and kind. But what about this gift? Shall I give it to you now?’

‘If you like, but I want nothing but yourself, my darling.’

‘And one other thing, mother. You had two children once,’ said Rhoda, rising with a great trembling. ‘Your heart yearns often after Denis, mother, and Denis has come back.’

Then Denis Holgate entered the room and shut the door.





CHAPTER XXIV.

SUNRISE.

‘There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th’ everlasting clime.’

KEBLE.

‘**W**HEN did Denis say he would come to-day,
Rhoda?’

‘As soon as he could. I think he will not be very long,’ Rhoda answered cheerily. ‘Does not the sun seem to shine brighter to-day, mother, because Denis has come back?’

The mother smiled a sweet and happy smile, but did not answer by words. It was easy to see from that smile that her heart was most utterly at rest. The last years had wrought a change, too, on Anne Holgate: the old ambition had waned, pride and bitterness had grown less hard. After her boy was gone, she knew that in sending him away, in her whole rearing of him, she had made a grand mistake. Like too many things for which we strive in this world, when the desire of her heart

was granted, it became bitter to the taste, and she knew that it was not her desire at all. Perhaps her anxiety and care about Rhoda helped her to this conclusion. Left alone with her girl-child, she began to study her, and to her astonishment discovered that of the two hers was the finer nature. It was too late, however, for her influence to be of much use. She had left the girl in her young childhood to mould her own character, and when she turned her attention to her after Denis was gone, she discovered that Rhoda was no girl, but a woman, with mature and pronounced opinions, which she could not hope to shake. As time went on, Anne Holgate learned other lessons of humility and gentleness and love. Without saying much or making any fuss, Rhoda took her way of life into her own hands, asking advice or help from none. But in the midst of her self-will she was most kind, most attentive, most tender in her dealing with her mother. It was her aim that no care should touch that worn and weary heart. Her mother was all she had upon the face of the earth, and that her mother might be well and comfortable Rhoda toiled without a thought of self. She had her reward in the slow sweet turning of her mother's heart to her, until she knew herself the dearest in the world; ay, dearer even than Denis, the worshipped idol of the past.

Rhoda's complete joy at the return of her brother was to Anne Holgate a wonderful and mysterious thing. Had she been cold, distant, bitter, she could not have cast upon her a breath of reproach.

She looked at her at that moment, standing within the curtains of the window, watching for him as one watches for the absent and beloved. The lightness of her heart seemed to have sought expression in her attire. She had lace about her throat and a cluster of Christmas roses nestling among it. Her face was radiant; it even seemed to the fond, proud mother that there was a brighter sheen upon her golden head. As Rhoda watched, she saw a carriage whirl rapidly up the street; and, knowing what it meant, her heart beat more quickly, her breath came quick and fast, her colour rose, and she looked with a slight apprehension at her mother. Before she could speak, the prancing horses drew up at the door, and a moment later a loud knock sent its echoes through the quiet house.

‘That is Denis, mother,’ said Rhoda, laying her cool, soft hand on her mother’s brow as she passed her couch. ‘He has brought some friends with him to see you, old friends. You will be calm at meeting with them? They have been anxious, like him, to see you for very long.’

There was the sound of voices and steps and the rustle of women’s dresses at the door. Anne Holgate half raised herself on her elbow as it was opened. She had no time nor desire to look beyond the first who entered, a tall, slender, wasted woman, with a tottering step, and a haggard, pallid face, lined deep with the furrows of age and pain, her sunken eyes brilliant just then with a strange and eager light. She crossed

the room with a swift step, and knelt—ay, very low—beside Anne Holgate's couch. Her veil was thrown back, her ungloved, nervous hands outstretched in entreaty, her worn eyes fixed with sad eagerness on the face now flushed with strong excitement.

‘Anne! Anne! forgive me! I regret the past. I am a sinful, miserable old woman. Forgive me, for my son's sake, before I die!’

Anne Holgate trembled before the kneeling figure; memories shook her, half-forgotten words and looks came back; she could not for a moment calm herself sufficiently to speak.

‘If not for my son's sake, for his children's, Anne,’ repeated the proud woman more humbly. ‘It was a great wrong I did you, one for which you and yours have most bitterly suffered. But forgive me! you were always a nobler, better woman than I.’

Anne Holgate looked wonderingly round her. Her children were there, and a sweet woman with a girlish face and figure, clasping Rhoda's hands and smiling up into her face, and here, at her feet, Lady Katharine, kneeling with her head bowed, asking to be forgiven for the past.

What it meant, how it had come about, she did not know. She closed her eyes and her lips moved. Lady Holgate, looking up, saw the tears rolling slowly down her cheeks. She leaned forward and kissed them away. Then Anne Holgate opened her eyes and smiled, and their hands met in a long, lingering clasp. But not a word was spoken.

‘Will Rhoda come to me?’ said Lady Holgate, looking round at length to see her other grandchild.

Rhoda, smiling, came across the room and sat down on the couch beside her mother.

‘This is *my* child, Anne,’ said the old woman tremulously. ‘This is a Holgate of St. Cyrus. It is my son’s eyes I see. Don’t you remember, Anne, how his bright hair used to lie low on his brow just like Rhoda’s? My dear, will you kiss your grandmother, and forgive her for your mother’s sake?’

After a time Winifred Barham joined a little in the talk, and so they grouped themselves about Anne Holgate’s couch, and there was not a discord or a jar. For the moment even the past had not a sting.

‘Rhoda and I are old friends. We met once, many years ago,’ said Winifred, as her hand fell lightly on Rhoda’s slender shoulder.

She looked up, and their eyes met.

‘Yes,’ said Rhoda, and her eyes filled, though her voice was low and steady. ‘But you have given me another flower to-day, Winifred, and I shall not throw it away.’

The sun had set with a lingering and exquisite radiance on the sea. The after-glow still remained on the shimmering waves, though the moon had risen, and in the clear evening sky many stars were shining.

Down the Rectory Lane, in the sweet, falling

twilight, came two figures, a lady and a gentleman, walking leisurely, as if they had come out to enjoy the restful calm of the summer night. At the end of the village street they turned aside and took the path which led by the home of Captain Silas to the shore. There was no one in it now. As he had left it, so it still remained. But there was no sign of neglect or decay about the little home: the windows were clean and bright, their muslin screens fresh and white, the doorstep cleanly washed, the little garden free from weeds. The dwellers in the Haven kept it thus, a little sanctuary sacred to the memory of Captain Silas. Cicely Sutton kept the key, and it gave her a melancholy pleasure to show the place to any interested, sympathetic visitor, and to tell with many a tear the story of the old man and the little child. The two who paused a moment by the low fence guarding the place from the road had known and loved them both, and they talked of them as they walked on, perhaps mostly of the little child.

‘We expect to see the fog-bell house a reality before we leave the Haven this year,’ said Winifred Barham, as they turned their faces seawards. ‘The plans are approved, and the work is to begin immediately. Grandmamma is so interested in it, Denis. She has grown to love this place.’

‘As all do who ever come to it,’ answered Denis Holgate dreamily. ‘You will let me contribute something to the fund? I should like to feel I had put a stone in the fog-bell house, which will be a fitting memorial to Gilbert’s little girl.’

‘If it will please you very much, I will,’ said Winifred, with a smile, and then a silence fell upon them. They knew each other so well now, that words were not a necessity in their companionship. As yet no word of love had passed the lips of Denis Holgate, though that love had become the most precious thing in his life. It was now two years since Guy Barham’s death. I do not know that Winifred suspected his love; she had found his friendship very sweet, and had not troubled herself regarding any issue it might have. She was quietly, unmistakeably happy in her way of life, devoted to her grandmother, and loving with true sincerity the new friends she had found in Denis Holgate’s mother and sister.

‘Why did you not wait and bring Aunt Anne and Rhoda down?’ she asked presently. ‘Another day was not very long to wait.’

‘No, but I wanted to come alone first, Winifred,’ he made answer, and she did not ask him why.

They made a goodly pair standing together on the high footpath leading across the marshes: he tall, strong, resolute, bearing his manliness in every gesture; a strong man, a good man, a true man Denis Holgate now in every particular, a man who having found his life-work did it to the utmost of the ability God had given him, and wholly for His sake. Needless to say, his work was a blessing to himself and to many others. A God-fearing physician, with opportunity to minister both to soul and body, what man could desire a nobler

heritage or wider scope? Unto whom much is given, of him much will be required.

‘Will Mr. Frew come with them to-morrow? He will take a rest soon surely. He has been a veritable slave to St. Saviour’s for twelve months and more.’

‘If not to-morrow, he will come soon, I fancy,’ said Denis Holgate, with a slight smile. ‘How restful it is here! I know of nothing which can give a worker fresher energy than this. The wide-ness, the freedom, the peculiar beauty of this prospect always impress me. Just look at yonder light on the sea, Winifred. Is it not exquisite?’

They had now reached the little promontory where the hulk of the *Lucy Wright* still lay; and it seemed natural that they should pause awhile, as many strollers did, and take their rest beside ‘th’ owd lass.’

The tide was full, and lapped the shore with a soft, musical murmur which mingled sweetly with the other drowsy sounds of the summer air. The fishing-boats in the breakwater were drifting lazily to and fro, as if playing with the soft night wind. On the sand-hills the pink sea-daisies, beloved of their little name-child, blew freshly among the tall green grass. The Haven was in the prime of its summer beauty, no hint of cruel storm or treacherous fog was in sea or air or sky.

Winifred sat down on the old boat, her white dress showing well against the dark background. She took off her hat and allowed the sweet wind to play with the waving hair which no fastening could

keep from straying on her broad white brow. Hers was a sweet face indeed ; all lines and marks of care had wholly gone from it now, because her heart was most utterly at rest ; she knew that she was perfectly happy at this moment, and that she wished it might last for ever. But she did not admit to herself that it was because Denis Holgate stood near, his earnest tones making sweetest melody in ear and heart.

‘ Winifred,’ he said presently, bringing his eyes from the moonlit pathway on the sea to her sweet dear face, ‘ do you feel happy and at home here with me ? ’

‘ Yes.’

Winifred Barham could not have uttered another word, and she began to tremble, she knew not why.

‘ I have tried to make myself a worthier, better man, Winifred ; my desire first being to make myself worthy of your precious friendship. It is still precious, but it is not enough. Do you understand ? ’

She bent her head and clasped her hands, and the sweet colour rose silently in her cheek. But no word fell from her happy, trembling lips. Only her heart filled with that unspeakable tenderness and rest a woman feels when the crown of her life comes to her, offered in a true, earnest, unselfish love.

‘ I am still very unworthy. The best of us, I think, however we may strive and labour, fall far short of the height upon which such women as you

stand unapproached. A good woman, even on earth, lives nearer heaven than any man can ever hope to live. Will *you* help me, Winifred? Will you take me as I am, and let me try to care for you? As I live, I love you beyond anything on earth. You know all my past. In our talks I have hid nothing from you, and yet, knowing all, you have not withheld your friendship,' he went on. 'It is that which gives me courage to ask that you will not withhold something else from me. I have not much to offer you, and I know that if you come to me you will have to give up much. But love has made me bold. Winifred, will you give me yourself?'

She rose, hat and wrap fell to the grass at her feet, and she stood before him with clasped hands in silence. But her eyes met his, and their infinite trust had a message for him.

So, by the old boat where Denis Holgate had spent a dark hour in the old life, the dawn of the new cast its radiance on his happy heart. For there is no hour in a man's life when he feels nobler and better and more earnest in all that is good, than when a good woman places her hand in his, and, with the trust of infinite love, leaves her destiny to be shaped by his love. A pure and unselfish human love beyond a doubt brings our hearts more near to the greatness of the Divine.

An hour later Denis Holgate took Winifred back to the Rectory, but left her to go in alone. He

wanted to look down before it was too late to see his old friends at the 'Boot and Shoe.' He was glad to find Cicely alone in the kitchen; Sutton, tired with his day's work, had gone early to bed. Cicely was putting things in shape for the night, the loungers about the old inn having also wearied of their own conversation, and sought their homes to rest their tongues.

'Coom in, coom in, Doctor 'Ow'git,' she said most heartily. 'I heerd yo'd coom; indeed I saw tha ower th' marshes wi' Mrs. Bar'am. An' art tha weel, doctor? Eh, but it's a rare pleasur' to see thee agen. Thou'rt not furgetten i' th' Haven, noan more'n th' parson, bless 'im! But sit doon, sit doon. Nivver moind ma lang tongue, but coom tell me a' aboot thysen.'

'There is not very much to tell, Cicely. I am a very busy and a very happy man,' he answered readily.

She looked at him keenly with her kind, clear eyes.

'I wadna seek to be impident, doctor; it's because I loove tha I'd loike to hear summat more,' she said, with her pleasant smile. 'When I seed yo an' her sittin' bi tha owd boat, I says to mysen, that's a' reet. We a' loove her here i' th' Haven. Th' owd lady an't a bad sort either; but Mrs. Bar'am, she's an angel. Is she to be thy angel, doctor?

'Yes.'

Then Cicely had to shake him by the hand, and bid God bless them both, in her hearty, loving fashion.

‘An’ we’ve gotten Lyddy made a grand lady sin’ thou wert here last year,’ she said, with a twinkle in her eye. ‘Thou made a mistak’, doctor, if thou thowt as oor Lyddy ’ud wear th’ willow fur thee. She’s drivin’ her own kerrige up theer near Waveney, an’ seems as happy as a queen.’

‘How did it come about?’ Holgate asked, with deep interest. He had heard of the marriage, but knew no particulars.

‘It began last September, when he wur livin’ i’ the Haven wi’ his mother an’ sisters, as foine ladies as ivver you saa! Lyddy got in wi’ them, an’ they wur vera friendly, an’ the young gentleman, he got into the way o’ coomin’ here of an evenin’, an’ so a bit o’ loove grew up atween the twa. He’s as foine a chap as yo ivver seed. An’ i’ the winter they had ’er up stayin’ wi’ them at the Hall, where she’s th’ mistress noo; an’ they’re a’ as happy as can be. He has plenty money. Yo’ ken the big mills up at Thornleigh belongs to him. Ay, the girl’s gradely weel off noo, an’ she knaws it, doctor. Theer nivver wur a greater change in enny won than in oor Lyddy, she’s that gentle an’ kindly; an’ she mak’s him a good woife, as weel she may. So tha sees, doctor, she’s made a better match, after a’, than thou’d ’a been, eh?’

‘She has indeed. I never was so glad to hear anything,’ Holgate said sincerely.

‘Bless me! theer’s some won at the door, an’ it after ten. Theer’s fowk, doctor, as ’ud pour beer into their insides mornin’, noon, and neet if they cud get them silly enow to give it ’em,’ said

Cicely somewhat wrathfully ; but, to her astonishment, the door was opened immediately after the knock, and who should enter but the ' parson,' as Gilbert Frew was still affectionately called in the Haven, though there was another in his place.

' Bless me, Gilbert !' exclaimed Holgate in utter amazement. ' Where have you sprung from ? I left you in London this morning.'

' Yes ; but I came in by the last train, and have walked from Southport. And how are you, Cicely ? You are not a bit changed,' he said heartily, as he shook hands with his old friend.

She was not able to speak, her eyes were full of tears, and she turned aside with a sob. The sight of the parson awoke too many memories, very tender memories, in her heart.

' Can you put me up, Cicely ?' asked the parson after a minute, and that brought back her self-control.

' Surely, surely, and reet prood to do it, sur,' she said, hugely pleased at the idea of giving him house-room at the ' Boot and Shoe.'

' There is plenty of room at the Rectory, Gilbert,' Holgate said ; but the curate nodded to him, and he understood that, to please Cicely, he would stay the night at least at the inn.

' Don't shut up for a little, Cicely. I shall walk round to the Rectory with the doctor,' he said. ' I have a great deal to say to you when I come back.'

So the friends left the house together, and walked arm in arm down the quiet familiar street and turned up the Rectory Road.

‘I am going back to-morrow. I wanted to see you to-night, Denis, before your mother and sister come down.’

‘Yes,’ said Denis, rather absently. He had caught sight of a shadow on the blind at one of the Rectory windows, and for a moment his thoughts wandered to Winifred.

‘Can you guess why?’

‘No; what is it? Anything particular?’

‘Yes. Will you give your sister to me, Denis?’

‘Rhoda?’ A smile dawned on the surgeon’s face. ‘I have no control over her. It would be rather late in the day for me to seek to rule her actions, wouldn’t it?’

The curate smiled too; but in a moment Holgate became serious and earnest, and, turning to his friend, grasped his hand.

‘We have been brothers so long, Gilbert, that it seems as if nothing could bring us any nearer to each other,’ he said. ‘But there is nothing in the world would give me greater joy than to see Rhoda your wife.’

‘I thought so, but I wanted to hear it from your lips,’ said the curate. ‘I feel at times that I have asked a great deal from her. She is so young and beautiful. Life is all before her. And I am growing old, Denis, and these motherless boys are no light charge.’

‘Old! You will never be old. And if Rhoda chooses to take the boys, Gilbert, she will not consider them a burden. It will be the very life for her. She *has* promised, I hope?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then we are both going the same way,’ said Denis lightly. ‘Winifred has not said me nay, Gilbert.’

‘I did not think she would. God bless you both!’

They had reached the Rectory Lane, and a little way along its leafy shade they paused, and, leaning on the low wall, looked over into the churchyard.

‘We have been strangely led since we were so familiar with this place, Gilbert,’ said Denis, looking round. ‘Many a time have I come down this lane with an awful bitterness in my heart. I am overwhelmed when I think of the mercy the Lord has vouchsafed to me. At this moment I cannot honestly say I have a single care.’

‘You have not been without them in the past. What a future is before you and your sweet wife! She will be a true helpmeet to you, Denis.’

‘She will; but, Gilbert, she has given up a great deal for me. When she becomes my wife not only Scaris Dene, but her late husband’s means, will pass from her. *I* am glad that it is so. I could not bear that she should spend anything of his; but it is a sacrifice few women would make without the slightest hesitation, as she has done. It but makes my debt the greater.’

‘Don’t brood upon it. Love is nothing without sacrifice; it is its crown. And what is she giving up in comparison with what she is gaining? The mere things of this world will never satisfy the need of a human heart. And, besides, some day you will be able to give her a great position.’

She may be Lady Holgate of St. Cyrus some day.'

Denis shook his head.

'I should not like to trust to that, but I can honestly say I do not desire it. I love my work; and, thanks to my grandmother's generous kindness, I am now in a position to offer my wife a home where at least sordid care will never touch her. She paid two thousand pounds for Parsons' practice, Gilbert. Would you have thought it worth that?'

'Yes, it is very extensive. You had a tough battle with Lady Holgate, I fancy, regarding the relative advantages of the East and West End?'

'Yes. She was for the West End practice, of course; but the ladies all sided with me, and we won the day. But I only regard my grandmother's money as a loan. I gratefully accept the kindness she bestows on my mother, but I cannot take anything for myself.'

'You have a proud spirit, Denis. Have you never seen your uncle yet?'

'No; he would not receive me, or acknowledge my mother. He has alienated himself from his mother on our account, and lives, I am told, like a hermit at St. Cyrus. His ill-health prevents him going out. He must be very wretched.'

They were silent a moment, and listened to the soft wind stirring the leafy branches of the limes and sighing through the churchyard grass.

Peace was in both their hearts, and a humble gratitude for the care and love which had so

guided their footsteps along some of life's thorny paths.

'What are you thinking of, Denis?' asked the curate, seeing the softened and beautiful expression on the face of his friend.

'I was recalling some words your little daughter said to me long ago in the garden up yonder.'

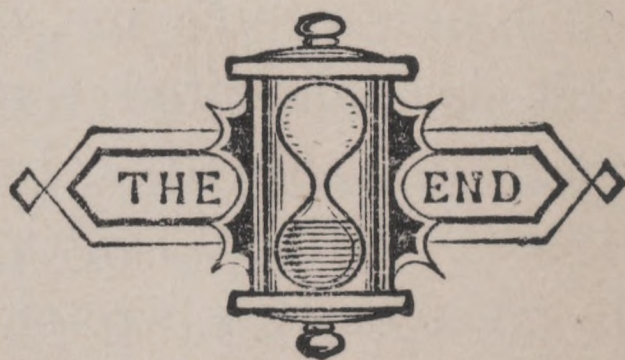
'Ay? what were they?'

'"God knows all about us. He loves us very much." If we could always remember that, Gilbert, how very different would be our walk through life!'

'It would, my friend. Ay, the child's faith has had an early fruition. But we must battle on, doing what we can for His sake. May we all pass into His presence with souls as pure and loving as hers.'

The surgeon brushed the tears from his eyes as he answered, low and reverently,—

'Amen, and amen!'



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